University of Alberta

Embodied Boundaries: Images of Liminality in a Selection of Women-Authored Courtship Narratives

by

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Abstract

This Comparative Literature dissertation innovatively juxtaposes East and West, ancient and modern, and multiple linguistic communities (i.e., Japanese, French, and English) in order to reveal connections that add to our knowledge of World Literature and the human condition. By closely examining liminality in women's writing from discrete literary traditions, we can observe a meaningful strategy for social comment and protest employed by a broad selection of authors. The careers of characters such as Ukifune in Genji monogatari by Murasaki Shikibu, Guilliadun in Eliduc by Marie de France, Lady Matilda in A Simple Story by Elizabeth Inchbald, and Lily Bart in A House of Mirth by Edith Wharton all stage for the reader a dynamic process leading from marginalization to a form of qualified empowerment, via the paradoxical embodiment of the boundary. This line simultaneously defines the rigid dichotomies that constrain their lives and relationships with others and offers the promise of a "space of preparation" (Bachelard) for eventual subjectivity and agency. My heroines respond to the demands and perils of romance by living literally on the edge, creating a form of refuge and potentiality on, rather than behind or beyond, the limen itself. Whereas either side functions as a hostile "anti-space" (Bronfen), the threshold itself offers, if not "felicitous space" (Freyer), at least the possibility of manipulation and subversion. Anthropologists (Turner, van Gennep) have explained that the liminal primarily serves to reinforce the social structure, but nonetheless remains an unsettling stage of disruption or even threatened destruction governable only by strict adherence to ritual. The act of embodying and extending this normally transient phase allows intelligent, strong-willed heroines to protest their bounded bodies and speak the unspeakable. Employing a feminist critical stance, I demonstrate how certain women authors, despite obvious differences in their respective socio-cultural contexts, employ strikingly (dis)similar liminal images that act in a creative and revolutionary way to destabilize the prevalent centre/margin paradigm and thereby challenge gendered hierarchical practices based on a damaging imbalance of power.

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Table of Contents

Introduction **1**
Bounded Bodies and Embodied Boundaries 1
The Comparative Literature Context 10
Negotiating Gendered Space 20
The Liminal: Betwixt and Between 29
The Texts 35
Genji Monogatari 35
Eliduc 39
A Simple Story 42
The House of Mirth 45

Nakazora, or "In Mid-Air": The Existential Liminality of Ukifune **50**
Rereading the Genji Monogatari 50
Background 57
The Monogatari Genre 67
No Place in this World 73
The Secret of Ukifune 90
Patriarchy and Paternal Denial 104
Turning the Binaries Inside-Out 112

Wife/Not-Wife: Guilliadun's Suspended Animation **120**
The Threshold of Art? 120
Background 128
Rereading Eliduc 134
Responding to Fin'amors 140
The Other, Woman 149
Temporal Suspension as Heterotopia 166
No Man's Griselda 178

To Be and Not To Be: Lady Matilda in A Simple Story **191**
Stopped Short at the Door 191
Background 200
The Desperation of Dependency 209
The Feminine as Taboo 217
The Woman in the Attic 228
Strategic Submission 241
A Special Province 253

"Nine-and-twenty, and still Miss Bart": Homeless in the House of Fools **262**
Beyond? 262
Background 272
The New Woman 280
A Heroine's Homelessness 284

Une jeune fille à marier 293
The Crisis of the Threshold 307
A Moment's Ornament 320

Conclusion **332**

Works Cited **339**

Introduction

> *La maison vécue n'est pas une boîte inerte. L'espace habité transcende l'espace géométrique.*
>
> - Gaston Bachelard, La poétique de l'espace

Bounded Bodies and Embodied Boundaries

In S/Z, Roland Barthes claims that what inspires us to read and reread a text is that, having once been seduced by its enigmatic "code herméneutique," we feel the need to decode those elements that remain unresolved for us as readers (Barthes 26-27). For literary critics, this enigmatic as-yet-unresolved is what we see as justifying yet another addition to the body of scholarly studies on given works of literature, and that is indeed the impulse behind the dissertation now open before you. In my increasingly intriguing and intimate engagements with women's writing of the romance[1] or what may be termed the courtship narrative, I have found myself noting recurrent images of bounded bodies and embodied boundaries, and subsequently posing certain questions: What do these images mean? What role do they play in that enigmatic code that constitutes the rhetoric of the text? How might they have signified to the author and her contemporary readership? And how do they signify to readers today? In a broad range of texts authored by women, in which fraught male-female relationships form the core, strikingly similar elements related to boundary fixation and a sense of being neither here nor there seem to demand deciphering, and I have thus been drawn to explore what I hope to show are rewarding connections between otherwise quite disparate works, namely the Genji Monogatari by Murasaki Shikibu, Eliduc by Marie de France, A Simple Story by Elizabeth Inchbald, and The House of Mirth by Edith Wharton.

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[1] This term is used in the lower case to indicate a general mode rather than a specific literary movement. Gillian Beer, pages 59-77, distinguishes neatly between romance and Romanticism, as well as romance and Realism. For a good overview of the historical development and definition of "romance" or "the romance" in the European (chiefly British) context, see Beer, pages 1-16.

I will argue that in each of my four texts the heroine is faced with leaving behind the preliminal stage of childhood and progressing into a postliminal that necessarily involves a sexual relationship with a man. Because of the loss of autonomy this move entails, she prefers instead to remain within the liminal phase and occupy/embody the boundary she is supposed to be crossing. In other words, as will be explained below, these authors are all describing failed initiation episodes, whereby re-incorporation into society as an adult woman is depicted as a less than desirable passage and thus becomes something that must be resisted. Much current criticism of modern women's writing is concerned with how centre/margin dichotomies are being dismantled. As the editors of a collection of essays on Canadian literature point out: "The long-established binary models have ceased to signify for women writers. Out of the margin they have made many centers" (Neuman and Kamboureli x). It should be borne in mind that liminality is not marginality. My examination of the use of embodied boundaries in women's fiction demonstrates that a need fundamentally to undermine such binaries as centre/margin or domination/subordination by actually creating a subversive nexus outside of the rigid, hierarchical model is neither a new nor a Western development. I will show how the motif of a liminal existence (in various senses) has been employed cross-culturally for many centuries to challenge gender divisions and the often damaging power imbalances that constitute them, as well as the woefully restricted choices made available to women. This feminist critique is intended to reveal the hitherto unexplored implications of liminality in my texts, and thereby add to our understanding of one aspect of women's writing within the context of world literature.

Diane Long Hoeveler has coined the term "feminocentric discourse system" (Hoeveler xii) to describe the female gothic genre of late 18th-century England, but this phrase aptly characterizes a much broader range of writing by women regardless of nation or language of origin. In juxtaposing these four authors, each from an admittedly very different literary tradition born of very different social and historical circumstances, I will nonetheless demonstrate that they similarly negotiate with the prevailing ideas of gender, power, and subjecthood via their employment of bo(un)d(ar)y images. There are highly meaningful connections to be found here in the prevalence of liminal bodies and lives and in the significance of this rhetorical strategy. The editors of a recent volume of essays drawing connections between women writers in Heian Japan and Medieval Europe point to "a common preoccupation with women's self-expression and their desire for some kind of empowerment" (Stevenson and Ho xiv) to justify their comparative project. I similarly argue that this preoccupation is also visible and noteworthy in the specific texts selected for this study, and that it is masterfully expressed through the embodiment of the boundary. My authors do not, of course, speak with a unified voice—while they do overlap in the use of this spatial metaphor, they differ markedly in the individualized way in which they use it. Avoiding both essentialism and a colonizing universalism,[2] therefore, we nonetheless see women exercising their power to write fiction, and using this power to register a particular form of coded protest by describing how women's relations with men are impacted by gendered cultural practices.

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[2] While the term universalism has been virtually banished from the critical vocabulary of many disciplines today, it should be acknowledged that not all scholars are so quick to agree that the

In spite of significant differences in their narratives and the literary traditions from which they emerge, this comparative study of women-authored courtship narratives is unusually fruitful in that it allows a varied, in-depth analysis of the means of and rationale for a female character being made to embody the liminal or the in-between. It reveals how the authors destabilize an oppressive paradigm and challenge the hierarchical structure that seeks to deny women the right to full subjecthood and autonomy. Women tend to be cast as the disempowered margin to the masculine centre, but this polarized superior-inferior dynamic is problematized by the liminality of my heroines. Each of the heroines to be discussed is a young woman cut off from the hegemonies of power—orphaned (at least symbolically) and alone—who must negotiate social contracts over which she has been accorded but a meagre, compromised degree of control. Ukifune, Guilliadun, Lady Matilda, and Lily Bart cannot move legitimately or with any guarantee of physical safety between or within public and private spheres, and therefore, finding security on neither side, they prefer the no-man's-land (pun intended) of the dividing line itself. These women experience a very real vulnerability as the muted, marginalized segment of society whose existence is restricted and threatened through a denial of subjectivity. Rather than

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universal is always or by definition a falsely imposed, imperialistic notion. See, for example, Wladimir Krysinski's introduction to Kushner's The Living Prism, Steven Pinker's The Blank Slate (his work in cognitive science joins Chomsky's, and many anthropologists, in advancing the notion of underlying universals that belie radical differences among individuals—of interest is a surprisingly lengthy list of "Human Universals" compiled by Donald E. Brown, albeit comprising primarily "surface" elements, that Pinker reproduces as an appendix), and a website concerning an in-progress research project on literary universals: http://litup.unipa.it/docs/whatr.htm.

accepting that marginalization, however, they tactically retreat to the borderline marking their sphere of action, laying claim to that liminal space and the apparently, albeit paradoxically, limitless freedom it offers. The limens thus occupied function as what Gaston Bachelard once described as spaces of preparation, rather than merely refuges or hiding places: "il semble qu'en se conservant dans l'immobilité de sa coquille, l'être prépare des explosions temporelles de l'être, des tourbillons d'être" (Bachelard 110). While such exploding whirlwinds of being are not always fully realized, they do offer distinct possibilities of agency.

I will discuss below how the depiction of the limen in fictional works establishes spaces where problems can potentially be resolved and worlds redefined, at least temporarily. Any attempt to sketch out what particular physical and culturally produced spaces and their representation have meant to certain women writers will necessarily be suggestive rather than exhaustive. I focus on the image of boundaries as indicative of a subtextual comment on societal practices, drawing on examples from the romance. This broad mode in literature, when viewed through that specific lens, reveals fascinating insights into how and why an author may choose to politicize and textualize gendered space. Concerning the issue of relevance, Jonathon Culler has mused about the danger of "comparing works by authors whose last name begins with B, or works whose numerical place in a bibliography is divisible by thirteen" (Culler 271). While the texts and characters dealt with here are illustrations—I could have made other choices, and do indeed reference in passing other authors, works, genres, and national literatures—their selection is far from arbitrary. Culler rightly argues that any comparison needs to be grounded in a defensible and enabling point of departure, Erich Auerbach's Ansatzpunkt, which is concrete, precise, and possesses what Auerbach called "the potential for centrifugal radiation" (qtd. in Culler 271). As will be explained below, I have chosen works that strike me as incontrovertibly offering such enabling features for comparison in their concern with exploring the limits of culturally defined femininity by highlighting the potential of the liminal, and thereby effecting social comment and protest.

In this dissertation, I compare and contrast the boundaries defined, challenged and manipulated via this embodying act in the representation of a quartet of very different characters. Despite deep fissures of culture, language, and history, the similar interfaces of female bodies and boundaries in this quite possibly startling juxtaposition can teach us much about how some women writers textualize the problematics of interaction between the genders, particularly with regard to issues of personal security and freedom. In my readings, these texts so intimately concerned with a woman's fate within the liminal phase of courtship clearly foreground the difficult relationship between women and the boundary lines, both material and metaphorical, that surround them, in an exploration of what Elizabeth Bronfen has termed "the enspacement of human existence" (Bronfen, Richardson, 1). My focus will be how the "enspacement" of female existence in particular is marked and functions, insisting on the fundamental importance of boundaries of various sorts that I see as characteristic of much women-authored romance. This comparison will bring to light novel aspects of the texts under consideration, revealing what the analysis of texts from specific literary traditions can learn from others, with a view to adding a new dimension to the ongoing discussion of gendered space in women's writing.

Chapter One deals with the adventures of Ukifune, the heroine of the final parts of the Genji Monogatari. My objective in making a work of pre-modern Japanese literature the starting point for this study is not merely to show how Western feminist theory can be applied to the Other, to show how recent thinking about gender and literature elucidates aspects of the Genji. The intent is also conversely to reveal something of what that 1000-year-old text has to offer modern feminist theory, what writing by a woman who lived in the Japanese capital so long ago can teach us about the textualization of gender via the use of specific metaphors for encoding messages that are difficult if not impossible to state directly.[3] Mary Louise Pratt rightly reminds us that, as researchers of literature,

> [w]e are in the business … of making the familiar strange and the strange familiar. Our job is to make the transparent, common sense, less transparent and the opaque, radical otherness, less opaque. … It is not surprising that Clifford Geertz … saw a profound parallel between the work of the ethnographer and that of the literary scholar. Both mediate vast semantic distances, whether of time or space; both are dedicated to a 'getting straight how the deeply different can be deeply known without becoming any less different; the enormously distant enormously close without becoming any less far away' (48). (Pratt, "What's Foreign," 1284)

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[3] As Norma Field helpfully reminds us: "The widespread sense that theory comes from the West and texts (raw material) from Japan misplaces and misunderstands theory. That translation of and critical response to Saussure, whose belated reception surely stands at the head of the theoretical turn in literary studies, came in Japanese (in 1940–41) a good seventeen years earlier than in English should give some pause" (Field, "Cold War," 1264).

The vast distances—semantic or otherwise—addressed in my analysis thus are recast as defamiliarizing "dis-stances," to coin a term for what I hope will be an innovative vantage point whereby hidden elements of the texts can indeed be made deeply known, even while their deep-seated differences remain acknowledged.

Each of these individual works and authors has been the object of a broad range of scholarly investigation in the decades, even centuries, since its original appearance. The constraints of a doctoral dissertation mean that I cannot hope to engage directly with every previous study of a literary work, especially given the highly varied grouping on which I have chosen to concentrate. The approach to be taken here is generalist, insofar as generalizing (i.e., thinking beyond any one tradition) is the impulse behind any comparative project, but it does not follow that such an approach is by definition shallow or imperialist, as the charges sometimes levied against comparatists assert. This literary critical project is undeniably different in kind from one fully contextualized within the source culture and the scholarship arising from that culture and its acknowledged experts. However, David Damrosch's just released What Is World Literature? (see especially pp. 281-88) convincingly explains how generalists can offer something to even the most erudite specialists, by elucidating connections that may never occur to someone immersed in reading a work solely within its own historical, linguistic, and cultural setting. Accordingly, the byword for my employment of the specialized knowledge of national literature authorities will necessarily be selectivity, what has felicitously been termed a form of "scholarly tact" (Damrosch 286).

Coincidentally, Damrosch refers to Murasaki Shikibu's masterwork in his conclusion as to how Comparative or World Literature operates:

> when we read the Genji as world literature, we are fundamentally translating it out of its home culture and into a new and broader context. We can make this translation far more effectively if we attend to the insights that specialists possess, but we will use this information selectively and for different purposes. (Damrosch 297)

The basis for engaging with appropriate critical texts and approaches, understood as those that further my discussion by allowing me to justify and/or problematize this juxtaposition of texts from different times and places, will be outlined below and, I trust, sustained throughout this dissertation. Yves Chevrel, in the closing lines of his 1989 overview of the state of the discipline in France, cites another critic who rather caustically describes comparatists as "perceurs de frontières, qui jettent des ponts entre des rives qui séculairement s'ignorent—même si c'est parfois plutôt pour la perspective que pour la circulation" (Chevrel 123). While I do hope to offer a new outlook (perspective) on certain aspects of these texts, my goal is also to open the possibility for new traffic (circulation) among these and other too-long-isolated texts via Damrosch's metaphorical process of translation.

With regard to the new ties that may thereby be established between national literatures, it helps to bear in mind the following comment:

> Some literary scholars have a penchant for the preposition in, some for the conjunction and. In suggests that a reading is a matter of

> observation and inventory; and, that a reading is a collision. ....[4] Comparative literature is largely a discipline of the and type. It does its work best as a chain of ands: this relation and that relation and that relation…—each and modifying the sense of those that came before. (Saussy, "Comparative Literature?", 338)

In my own writing on a chain comprising Murasaki Shikibu and Marie de France and Elizabeth Inchbald and Edith Wharton, I intend to reveal the mutually informing relations that can be seen in the texts of these women writers, insofar as they are all concerned with the demands and perils of romance. My analytical bridges will be constructed across some rather daunting spans by means of these authors' employment of the embodied boundary motif as one possible female strategy for resisting victimization and laying claim to subjectivity and agency.

The Comparative Literature Context

This critical project is structured as a study of one salient feature of women's writing of courtship narratives in a variety of contexts: Heian Japan, Medieval and late 18th-century Europe, and the United States of the early 20th century. It begins from a stance that there is an inherent value to bringing disparate elements together, to moving beyond the bounds of national literatures and linguistic communities, to dismantling arbitrary divisions that impede a broader, more inclusive perspective.[5]

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[4] Damrosch also employs this term to describe a creative, albeit somewhat destabilizing, coming together of various entities: "The worlds of world literature are often worlds in collision" (Damrosch, World Literature, 14).

[5] Caryl Emerson (Emerson 6-8) paraphrases scholar Mikhail Epstein to the effect that the 21st century should in fact be the age of "transhumanities," following upon the previous century's "dehumanities" of psychoanalysis, Marxism, and (post)structuralism, which in turn were a response to the traditional humanities developed during the Renaissance.

Given that both Comparative Literature and feminist research are largely interdisciplinary in scope, they expose the falsity of many purportedly common-sensical divides. Together they can reveal that artificial barriers creating disciplinary terrains have "obstructed a complete view of women's situations and the social structures that perpetuated gender inequalities" (Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin, and Lydenberg 1). The new perspective indicates an increased "respect for particularity, indeed for Difference," with comparison functioning as a "liberating act, a shaping venture that ceaselessly reconfigures its materials and proffers pattern and gestalt where there had been discrete entities" (Bernheimer 79). The canon of our discipline has recently evolved to include many formerly excluded or marginalized voices (see, for example, articles by Apter, Pratt, and others in the 1995 Bernheimer Report, entitled Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism), and my dissertation is firmly placed within this new configuration. Bernheimer argues convincingly that

> comparative literature illuminates the artistic and cultural patterns of sameness and difference which exist both within and between societies, and it thereby gives us a precious contrastive portrait of societies' values and beliefs, as well as their aesthetic and literary traditions. (Bernheimer 81)

As indicated above, by refusing to limit my project to one or two national literatures, languages, or even centuries, I am making an argument for a decentring move, questioning and destabilizing assumptions as to how our world can be understood and thus potentially leading to a re-thinking of feminist and other theorizing that has been firmly rooted in the modern Western world. New ways of seeing and understanding the condition of women may well be revealed when the point of departure is not located solely within Europe and North America or a given historical era.

Goethe is commonly credited with articulating the new notion of *Weltliteratur* as part of the project of European modernity in the 1820s.[6] He coined the term "to indicate a time when all literatures would become one. It is the ideal of all literatures into one great synthesis, where each nation would play its part in a universal concert" (Wellek and Warren 48). The phrase "comparative" or "compared" literature has existed in French since at least 1816 (as a subtitle for an anthology of French, classical and English literature) and in English since 1848 (in a letter to his sister by Matthew Arnold).[7] Reference to an actual field of study by that name, however, was first made in German by Hugo Meltzl de Lomnitz in an 1877 article entitled "Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Literatur," or "The Present Tasks of Comparative Literature," with the modern discipline coming into existence just prior to and following WWII as many European scholars immigrated to North America. While Goethe's conception of "world literature" is that of a corpus of texts, comprising the literary commonwealth of humanity (needless to say, his was a heavily Eurocentric, masculine "humanity"), present-day World or Comparative Literature has normally been understood instead as a method applied to those texts. Both of these terms (sometimes used interchangeably, along with the currently unfashionable "general literature")[8] still remain frustratingly elusive as scholars maintain a somewhat conflicted relationship with the traditional concept of national literatures and their study. Nevertheless, supporters argue that the fruitful "mode of circulation and reading" (Damrosch 5)[9] that World/Comparative Literature offers, where all literatures become accessible for study, independent of arbitrary boundaries of nation or language, is ideally suited to the modern, transnational, very much interconnected world in which we live and work.

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[6] Goethe's thoughts on this concept are outlined in Johann Peter Eckermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens 1823-1832*. This text is available on-line through the Gutenberg project at http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/eckerman/gesprche/gesprche.htm.

[7] "[A]n attention to the comparative literatures [reveals] that England is in a certain sense *far behind* the Continent" (Russell 10). In a November 1857 lecture at Oxford, Arnold also made the following highly relevant comment: "Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration: no single event, no single literature, is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures" (qtd. in Bassnett 1).

Traditionally, Comparative Literature dealt with what are termed rapports de fait, or points of historical contact. Critics such as Claudio Guillén, however, have insisted that analysis of patterns to be found in historically unrelated works may in fact offer "the most promising tendency" (Guillén 87) for the discipline. He argues for an approach based instead on "the systematic study of supranational assemblages" (Guillén 3), which is the context into which my work is intended to fit. In the spirit of a discipline that is interested in both a temporal and geographical phenomenon, therefore, the works analyzed in my dissertation are drawn from various times and places: Japan circa the year 1000, Europe of the 12th and 18th centuries, and early 20th-century USA. I, on the other hand, am a product of late 20th- and early 21st-century Canada. Just as the traveller is often a different sort of person while abroad, "a literary work manifests differently abroad than it does at home" (Damrosch 6). This is not merely a function of translation,[10] but rather the effect of the cultural baggage (preconceptions and expectations) that new readers bring to the work as they access and assimilate it. No one would seriously argue that there is no need for detailed study of a given work within the specific cultural, social, and historical context as registered on its literary birth certificate, but there is nonetheless a certain value in issuing that work a laisser-passer to mingle with works of other national literatures (as well as the fuller variety of cultural products such as the visual arts or cinema). Freer circulation brings out so many aspects (e.g., themes, structures, and emphases) that had remained inadequately explored or even ignored altogether.

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[8] For a good introduction to the history and implications of all of these terms, see the chapter entitled "General, Comparative, and National Literature" in Wellek and Warren (pp. 46-53), or that entitled "Définitions" in Chevrel (pp. 7-10).

[9] There is broad unanimity that Comparative Literature is more about methodology than specific texts. Chevrel (7) uses the expression "une perspective d'étude de la littérature," for instance, and Saussy writes of "a practice, a way of constructing objects" (Saussy, "Comparative Literature?", 340).

The collision between (foreign) reader and (foreign) text can have one of three possible manifestations: a striking novelty (which, in its negative form, becomes exoticism); a perceived similarity (again, this has a negative form whereby discrete cultural experiences may be forced into a single universal mould); and a "middle range of what is like-but-unlike" (Damrosch 11-12). It is this last and most inspiring response that is behind my present project: by comparing and contrasting the uses of a particular motif in a specific selection of texts from around the world and different periods of history~~, I hope~~ in a small way to add to our grasp of what makes women's lives strikingly like while remaining just as strikingly unlike. Such unlikeness is owing to real and undeniable socio-cultural differences between people of different nations and ages, but also to the fact that women, or indeed any identifiable group, do not exist as anything like a monolithic set. There is no essential "Woman" or "eternal feminine" to be discovered and described, either within or without the literary imagination, but rather an endless variety of individual women with individual needs and desires. This does not, however, mean that there is nothing to be learned from other women's experiences. After all, it is only logical to expect a likeness of social practices producing at least some degree of likeness in reaction and comment. In her response to the recently released draft version of the American Comparative Literature Association's 10-year report on the state of the discipline, Caryl Emerson urges comparatists to continue the deconstructive tendency signalled by letting go of the political binaries and minority categories that defined us in the 20th century and instead:

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[10] Although, as Damrosch points out, "All works cease to be the exclusive products of their original culture once they are translated; all become works that only 'began' in their original language" (Damrosch 22). This is not to imply that a work such as the Genji does not still form part of an important entity known as Japanese Literature, of course, but rather that, once translated, it does become accessible (available to belong, in a sense) to all those readers who do not have access through that original language.

> start thinking in terms of 'variously delineated majorities': people grouped according to their experiences of illness, inspiration, love, creativity, suffering, loss, and other states that transcend identity. For more unites us than divides us. One must simply commit to finding co-experience interesting, and to defining the proper transcendent categories. (Emerson 7)

The rationale for this PhD dissertation in Comparative Literature is precisely that I do find the intercultural and the co-experiential interesting, and the like-but-unlike expression of a particular aspect of women's lives—their response to the gendered demands and perils of relationships—worthy of study.

Haun Saussy, author of that draft ACLA Report, sounds an optimistic note for this discipline as well poised to guide literary studies through the third millennium.

One might argue (as he in fact implies) that both literature and language are comparative in nature, and that therefore what another critic has characterized as this "dynamic and open discipline … committed to the dialogue between various albeit adverse partners" (Krysinski viii) is ideally suited to their analysis. Saussy claims that because we are now living in an age of information, unipolarity, inequality, and institutional transformation, the time is ripe for the age of Comparative Literature. This is, after all, a field that implicitly counters the "googlization" or flattening of knowledge to an accessibility that is superficial, market-driven, and restricted to the lowest common denominator. Comparative Literature is also by definition multipolar, challenging any superpower's hegemonic claims because it is founded on notions of the value of a free, open, and equal interchange of information. It inherently performs the interdisciplinarity and transnationalism that are the current buzzwords of our educational institutions and the political powers that fund them and define their mission statements. Our decades-long insistence on the broader literary context and interest in theoretical research and analysis are now so uncontroversial and mainstream that they have become implicit in scholarly work on texts of all sorts in virtually every language and country: "Our conclusions have become other people's assumptions" (Saussy, ACLA Report, 1).

Ever since its 19th-century origins, Comparative Literature has explicitly problematized facile categories, even or perhaps especially that of "literature" itself, thereby leaving its own scholars wondering what exactly it is that we can and should be comparing. Eminent critics such as Djelal Kadir have pointed to our discipline's "simultaneously productive and melancholy precariousness" (Kadir 245), and others such as Jonathon Culler have posed such fundamentally unsettling problems as "What makes comparison possible?" at all (Culler 268). Wladimir Krysinski has offered further important questions, such as "What gets compared? … Is comparison a valuable critical procedure in order to achieve knowledge? … Do time and space belong to the comparative method necessarily or contingently? … Is there something like comparative understanding at the basis of comparative literature?" (Krysinski x). These searching questions, which typically remain unanswered, are a response to charges of "scholarly tourism" (Damrosch 285) or dilettantism, and are symptomatic of the occupational hazard known as the "comparatist's lurking panic" (Damrosch 298). Does our apparent flexibility represent "a global passport" or a form of "statelessness" (Slemon 209) and aimlessness? This anxiogenic state of affairs is brought home repeatedly in the Bernheimer Report, but critic Linda Hutcheon joins many others in countering that such angst can indeed be "productive" (Hutcheon), if we learn to be comfortable enough with the "plural and contingent" to move beyond the frustrating vagaries of our self-definition.[11]

Comparative Literature has been characterized as "the discipline of the encounter" (Loriggio 258), often but not always the direct encounter of or influence upon one author and another, one literary tradition and another. Another description underscores its cross-disciplinary underpinnings—"une discipline à vocation transversale"—, explaining that, "A côté de disciplines qui se proposent d'explorer totalement un champ bien défini, la littérature comparée procède d'avantage par intersection : différentes aires linguistiques, littérature et arts, littérature et histoire, etc." (Chevrel 121). Eva Kushner writes that "[f]rom their earliest days comparative literature studies have lived in a paradox: they presuppose universals at work within human literatures and cultures, and seek to bring them to light through the examination of the diversity of these literatures and cultures" (Kushner 9).[12] While none of these definitions is adequate on its own, together they hint at some of the disciplinary possibilities. In this context, my dissertation engages with the enabling concepts of "encounter," "intersection," and commonality within diversity, performing the comparatist gesture of bringing otherwise discrete entities together and analyzing how their meeting enriches our understanding.

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[11] It should be noted that "world literature" also suffers from an identity crisis. Roland Greene calls it "a term without a concept" (Greene 1244). Damrosch's entire concern in his 2003 book is to define this puzzling "subset of the plenum of literature" (Damrosch, World Literature, 4), and he admits of the possible need to rephrase the question as: "What isn't world literature? A category from which nothing can be excluded is essentially useless" (110), before admitting that "in practice it is experienced as what is available to be read" (111).

Reading these disparate texts from a single early 21st-century Canadian perspective does inevitably run the serious risk of appropriation of voice. As Toril Moi rightly cautions, "it is not an unproblematic project to try to speak for the other woman, since this is precisely what the ventriloquism of patriarchy has always done: men have constantly spoken for women, or in the name of women" (Moi 67-8). Any analysis of a culture other than one's own must remain aware of the danger of daring to speak for the Other, of appropriating and (mis)interpreting what those from utterly different centuries and circumstances have said. While one could assert that every attempt to interpret a cultural artefact means a de facto act of speaking for its creator, whether sympathetically or not, it is a fact that the cross-cultural researcher must always remain especially conscious of the need to respect another's separate identity and experience. Of course, taking care always to ground our reading in what the text actually says (rather than, perhaps, what we might wish that it said)—ensuring that we remain philologically rigorous, in other words—is one effective way of avoiding many of the pitfalls of misrepresentation and ahistoricism.

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[12] Kushner helpfully elaborates throughout this essay, but I will limit myself in this footnote to one additional quotation: "Now the comparatist discourse of yesteryear was characterized by a certain number of simplifications, one of which was the concept of national literatures and their commonalities. It was the interplay of resemblances and differences that made the field comparative; the commonalities were emphasized, and they reassuringly seemed to illustrate the unity of the human phenomenon. It took us a long time to understand that unless we were sufficiently self-critical they would only illustrate the Western phenomenon ad infinitum but not even all of it: a cluster of supposedly major literatures in a few supposedly major languages" (Kushner 13).

One must also be wary of anachronistic terminology such as "medieval feminist" and unjustified exploitation of early texts in the name of an unrelated, foreign perspective. Much feminist criticism in the West has come dangerously close to "assign[ing] itself the status to train women of 'other places' to be women" (Spivak 52). Unlike André Breton, in whose view Hopi cave paintings proved beyond a doubt that they were obviously surrealists just like him (see Balakian), I am not making any bald claim that Murasaki Shikibu, Marie de France, Inchbald or Wharton must belong to a narrow category of "feminist" as defined today. Terms and phrases such as "patriarchal oppression" and "violation of personal space" certainly were not part of the vocabulary (be it Japanese, French, or English) until very recent times indeed. However, the ideas and emotions behind this modern-day wording are hardly new, and one could argue, for example, that such texts as Le Livre de la Cité des Dames (1405) are potentially as enlightening to the querelle des femmes in the Canada of 2005 as in fifteenth-century France. This project accordingly aims to find its niche within the search for particular, and meaningful, commonalities among women writers involving literary strategies that can be used to exemplify and shed light on so many of the concepts and arguments that continue to fascinate us today.

The notion of universality has been attacked as naïve liberal humanism in recent years, with more than one scholar insisting on literature's profoundly "restricted permeability" (Spivak 66) to argue that attempts to read nuances based on the culture and language of another are presumptuous at best and imperialist at worst. Nevertheless, I would argue that the logical conclusion of such a rigid position is for a critic to eschew analysis of any but the works s/he has written her/himself. Far from being "in its moment of dying transition" (Slemon 217),[13] Comparative Literature continues to offer a rejuvenating viewpoint from which to read linguistic, cultural, and individual difference—and what else is literature for?

Negotiating Gendered Space

Any discussion of female-gendered liminality must acknowledge its indebtedness to the significant number of theorists who have dealt with women and space, and I will here mention a few that have directly influenced my work. Elizabeth Bronfen's Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text (1999) usefully analyses how "the representation and semantic encoding of actual material (begehbare) and metaphorical spaces [is a] seminal concern" (Bronfen 1) of Richardson's, and in so doing helps to decode a wealth of similar concerns elsewhere. Kerstin Shands' Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse (1999) is an interesting study of the "imagery of spaces, boundaries, circles, and cycles, as well as imagery of movement within or out of limited spaces" (Shands 1) that function as the enabling metaphors of feminist theory itself, where these "[c]oncepts of space carry a structuring and orientating [sic] force" (2). Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987), which virtually established the field of Chicana Studies, does so on the basis of a gendered articulation of displacement and in-between-ness. Judith Fryer's Felicitous Space (1986) looks at work by writers Edith Wharton and Willa Cather with a view to exploring what "the stories imaginative women, in the spaces they find themselves, tell" (Fryer, Felicitous Space, xiv). And, of course, no one can write on anything related to women and space without explicitly or implicitly indexing Virginia Woolf's ground-breaking feminist treatise, A Room of One's Own (1929), which set the terms for all the discussions to follow.

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[13] As far back as 1958, even a devoted supporter such as Albert Guérard was predicting the "suicide" of Comparative Literature as a necessary response to the great achievement of European unification, that it would "disappear in its very victory" (Guérard 4). Nonetheless, he did grant the discipline at least a temporary reprieve based on its perceived messianic role: "we are needed so long as the nationalistic heresy has not been extirpated" (Guérard 5). The apparent tenacity of such "heresies" is perhaps the reason we are still discussing our supposedly imminent demise in 2005.

The above authors, with the exception of Woolf, are themselves indebted to the foundational texts of spatial theory, namely the dense philosophical ruminations of Maurice Blanchot in his L'espace littéraire (1955); Bachelard's poetico-philosophical approach to the topic in La Poétique de l'espace (1957); Michel Foucault's brief but widely cited lecture "Des Espaces autres" (1967); and Henri Lefebvre's Marxist analysis of society and space, La Production de l'espace (1974). Walter Benjamin's thought-provoking depiction of the flâneur in his work on Baudelaire (1938) has also been influential. More recently, geographers such as Edward W. Soja and Gillian Rose, and architectural theorists such as Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley have greatly expanded our understanding of the implications of space, particularly where gender comes into play. I trust that my exploration of the liminal motif in women-authored courtship narratives under consideration here will contribute to the ongoing, stimulating dialogue begun by these esteemed figures.

A distinction must obviously be made between material spaces (i.e., actual, physical space that one may occupy and through which one may pass)—these can be further subdivided into real and imagined material spaces—and the metaphorical spaces (e.g., imagined, psychological, or symbolic) that one may inhabit in a more figurative sense. My particular interest is in how material and metaphorical spaces, specifically the boundaries employed to define them, are used in literary representation as responses to the tensions of interpersonal relationships and incorporation into fixed social roles. I will demonstrate that due attention to the purport of liminal space and its utilization by Murasaki Shikibu, Marie de France, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Edith Wharton uncovers eloquent layers in their work and adds immeasurably not only to our comprehension of what are very finely nuanced examples of women's writing, but also to our understanding of women's lives and experiences overall.

In this post-modern world in which we live, as Foucault, Soja, and others have argued, space has overtaken history as the foundation for insights in critical theory. It is no longer the making of history that offers revelations about this world and our relation to it, apparently, but rather the making of geography. A linear and forward-moving notion of our world as one of continuous progress has given way to a conceptual framework based instead on circularity, simultaneity, non-causality, and the juxtaposition of multiple, often contradictory elements. Foucault writes, for example, that "[n]ous sommes à un moment où le monde s'éprouve […] moins comme une grande vie qui se développerait à travers le temps, que comme un réseau qui relie des points et qui entrecroisent son écheveau" (Foucault, "Espaces," 46). Accordingly, a polyvalent space forms the essential backdrop against which to measure and thus seek to understand humanity. Although this dissertation project is not concerned with such broad notions of space as preoccupy Soja and Rose, for example, it does intend to deal with a form of human geography—albeit one far closer in (to paraphrase Adrienne Rich[14])—, namely, spatialization on a highly personal level, taking into account its gendered causes and effects. I will explore a point of thematic contact among these women writers incontrovertibly isolated from one another temporally, geographically, and culturally, and demonstrate how the resulting interconnected structure offers significant revelations about a woman's responses to patriarchy and the various boundaries it imposes.

In the works to be discussed, women's textualization of female space, however variously defined, functions as an encryption of reaction to its limits, an attempt to re-vision (the expression is again borrowed from Rich) and even redesign the personal, domestic environment and the relationships it houses in order to address damaging gender power imbalances. In examining the means by which these particular authors imagine and critique male/female relations, we acquire "a more textured understanding of the role of power in women's lives ... [and] grasp the interweaving nature of our social, political, and personal relationships" (Deveaux 243). Power and resistance are, of course, played out from shifting positions, acting upon or against the parameters that contain the action and define what types of acts can take place. Women play various roles in both responding to and constructing the terms of the society in which they live, and the spatial framework within which this negotiation of power is played out also has a role in determining and representing their power relations.

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[14] The reference here is to the line from Rich's "Notes on A Politics of Location" that reads: "Begin, though, not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in—the body" (Rich 638).

A body's negotiation of its spatial envelope—comprising both the external surroundings in which existence is played out and the internal space contained within corporeal or psychological limits—is what interests me here. While boundaries do serve to construct the within/without, inside/outside opposition, they also and more interestingly de-construct that opposition—the very permeability of the boundary turns its constraints back upon itself, exposing fraudulent claims of inevitability and authority. Power and resistance meet in a highly complex coupling, and there is no simple resolution available for human conflicts. The collision of contradictory needs, desires, and wills results from different circumstances and produces different effects depending on the socio-cultural context involved, and the multiple voicings of the experiences thereof that I will examine are intended to reveal some of the complexities and ambivalences involved. This project, through an exploration of a variety of embodied boundaries that typically function as the sign of inhibiting/inhabited space, will demonstrate that such spatial metaphor is a useful tool for learning how and why social comment and protest are encoded in female-authored texts. I will argue that the women writers discussed herein, as they metaphorically describe the complicated, eternally unstable nature of empowerment in interpersonal relationships, provide readers with significant insights into how the exercise of power interacts with a woman's life and choices, and in particular how she may choose to textualize the power/resistance matrix. If the flâneur maps urban space by movement through the cityscape; if the Marxist maps socio-economic space produced by dialectical relations that help or hinder those living and working there; if the utopianist maps our imperfect world by construction of a dreamlike ideal vision; my heroines map a uniquely feminine space by their movement out of the hegemonic centre-margin binary into an extra-ordinary space offering at least temporary refuge from oppressive patriarchal power.

This project, being deeply concerned with issues of power, is located at the intersection of the text and the politics inherent to human contact, but denies any clear-cut division of the sexes into oppressor and oppressed. I do not begin from the position that women (whether in the role of author, narrator, or character) are helpless, passive victims of patriarchy, or that—as Moi characterizes the argument propounded by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their groundbreaking The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination—"anger [is represented] as the only positive signal of a feminist consciousness" (Moi 62). Women in Heian Japan, Medieval and late 18th-century Europe, and early 20th-century USA possessed at least a degree of agency with regard to their own lives and the textualization of their experiences and ideas, and expressed a greater range of reactions, emotional or otherwise, in their writings than early feminist criticism in the modern Western world would seem to suggest. Therefore, a far more nuanced consideration of their relation to power and space is obviously required.

There exist myriad strategies for women, who are far from docile bodies, "to mediate and resist encroachments on their bodies and lives" (Deveaux 242), and women writers accordingly employ the lived or embodied boundary as the site not only where power is exercised, but more importantly where power meets resistance. We will see in the pages that follow how a female character's occupation of the boundary functions as a challenge to the dichotomous structures of her world, and how her actions mediate and negotiate a frequently ambiguous relationship with restrictive social structures and practices. Human beings, whether male or female, do not simply occupy space; they also contribute to its construction and shaping through that inhabitation. The focus of this dissertation is how embodiment of the boundary in women's writing cross-culturally reflects the responses to ever-shifting domination and subordination via the performance of roles along an empowerment/ disempowerment continuum. As certain women writers explore the play of power in relationships, they write of, through, and against spatially represented ideologies by demonstrating how the very boundaries defining those ideologies can be challenged, occupied, and manipulated in deliberate acts of resistance.

Space is often viewed solely as background, and yet, as philosophers and cultural theorists such as Bachelard, Lefebvre, and Michel de Certeau have demonstrated, it can also function as figure against the larger ground of the text. One commentator explains that, in La poétique de l'espace,

> Bachelard reveals time after time that setting is more than scene in works of art, that it is often the armature around which the work revolves. He elevates setting to its rightful place alongside character and plot, and offers readers a new angle of vision that reshapes any

> understanding of great paintings and novels, and folktales too. (Stilgoe x)

There is tremendous potential to be explored in this central "armature" of the text, especially with regard to how it engages with the territory defined by "home as place and home as metaphor" (Wiley and Barnes xv). What these texts reveal is that certain women writers living in different nations and centuries have used space as a meaningful image on multiple levels to explore a number of important questions: where are the boundaries of female space placed? who or what is included/excluded? is female space co-terminous with domestic space? who sets these boundaries? how complicit are we in constructing and/or submitting to confines? how can or should such confines be exploded?

In both East and West, the female sphere has to a greater or lesser extent traditionally been an interior, strictly limited one. Some authors react to patriarchal restrictions and threats by designing woman-centred utopias that seem to offer security of person; others choose to push the envelope of that female space and assert their right to transgress the boundaries society would impose on them; while still others have their heroines withdraw ever further inside the physical and psychological boundaries that define their personal space. Broadly speaking, women writers have employed a range of tactics available in what might be called the poetics of gendered space to register a protest and proffer alternatives that they have been unable or unwilling to make explicit—to speak the unspeakable, in other words. This dissertation project examines some of the varied responses to a boundary line that is registered simultaneously as indicating both prison and asylum, explored by authors between whom direct influence never enters into the equation. While female-authored texts that are undomestic in nature do certainly exist, the limits of the domicile function as a central fact and an equally central image for a significant number of women (including my authors) and thus cannot help but signify in the literal and figurative language they employ. The discussion centres on a selection of texts where a woman's embodiment of gendered physical and socio-cultural boundaries is central to a "feminocentric" story that deals with issues of violation, retreat, transgression, and subject formation.

Both male and female authors write of, from, within and against the spaces they occupy—whether such spaces are physical, cultural, political, literary, or otherwise. Nevertheless, the various limitations that most cultures have placed on the spheres women are allowed to occupy mean that the relationship between women writers and space is especially significant. As Rose comments about the supposedly transparent space that she sees as the sole focus of much masculinist geography, the "innocent space [of a less gender-aware conceptual model] isn't one I recognize; I feel excluded from its imagining" (Rose, "Notes," 72). This dissertation will explore to what degree certain women authors feel excluded from or oppressed by specific imaginings of space and femininity, and subsequently how they write themselves and their concerns "into" other spaces. The project aligns itself with the goals outlined by Barbara Bowen, editor of the Gender and Genre in Literature series, who argues for "the importance of gender as a category of analysis, [in order] to develop a complex and multiple understanding of gender with which to resee written culture" (Bowen ix). Given that corporeal, domestic, and literary space are all highly gendered in each of the cultures to be examined in this project, it would be naive at best and dishonest at worst not to take authorial gender into account in any "re-seeing" of these works and their spatial concerns.

The Liminal: Betwixt and Between

If, as Margaret Higonnet imagistically puts it in "Comparative Literature on the Feminist Edge," "[c]omparatists play the role of a hyphen in the world of humanities, … as indispensable as a suture in an operation," and if "[l]ike comparatists, feminist critics have stressed the re-examination of critical boundaries" (Higonnet 155), then it should come as no surprise that a project announcing itself under the banner of both comparative studies and feminist criticism should be so concerned with the textualization of the limen. Like Gustavo Pérez Firmat, whose 1986 book analyzes a carnavalesque liminality in Hispanic literature, my intention is "to explore and exploit the interpretive power, the hermeneutic reach" (Firmat xiii) of liminality.[15] This concept was first defined in early 20th-century anthropology by Arnold van Gennep, as the second of three phases of ritual initiation: séparation (the preliminal), marge (the liminal), and aggrégation (the postliminal). Beginning in the 1960s, Victor Turner elaborated on his predecessor's theory and set the stage for its wide-ranging application by scholars in many fields.

Rites of initiation occur at moments of a life crisis (e.g., birth, puberty, betrothal and marriage, death), events marking one's entry into a new social status.

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[15] For a succinct discussion of liminality and its application to English literature (examples given are Beowulf, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens, and C. Brontë) as well as to the conditions of literary production, see Makaryk 578-80.

As described by van Gennep, the liminal entity (various terms are used to describe this entity: liminar, neophyte, passenger, or initiand) generally retreats to a seclusion site, abandoning his/her previous role within the community and any privileges or property s/he may have enjoyed, in order to be ritually cleansed and then reincorporated, invested with a permanent and generally higher social position. Where the liminar is part of a group whose members are all to become initiates at the same time, this group often develops what Turner described as communitas, or a sense of comradeship or bonding. In any case, both single initiands and groups tend to be accompanied by a guide, mentor, or religious figure of some sort. The passage is typically facilitated by some form of sacra: the knowledge or gnosis acquired during the liminal phase that is communicated to successful liminars, equipping them to assume their new status. This entire concept, especially as developed by Turner, has proven popular and fertile for literary studies. Since the 1980s, several books and articles have addressed liminal aspects of journeys and pilgrimages, of banishments and shipwrecks, of feasting and celebrating in many famous works of literature. There is also an important series entitled Studies in Liminality and Literature, currently being published in Spain, that deals with "the poetics of the threshold" (Aguirre, Margins, i) in genres ranging from mythology to science fiction. With titles such as Margins and Thresholds, A Place That Is Not A Place, Betwixt-and-Between, and Mapping the Threshold, the editors seek to delineate the field within which scholars working on liminality are located, which they define as a "vast and mostly ill-defined territory which is (paradoxically) shaped by lines, thresholds, demarcations, and which (again paradoxically) is placing the question of peripheries at the centre of research" (Aguirre, Margins, i).

What this dissertation deals with are specifically "the phenomena and processes of mid-transition" (Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 18). Where neither side of a socially constructed binary (e.g., good/bad, dominant/subservient, innocent/guilty) offers a comfortable, secure fit, a not so illogical option is to straddle the boundary line or marge itself. The liminal phase is a state of indeterminacy, of being neither here nor there, this nor that. In my texts, we encounter heroines who have left behind the age of childhood and are poised to enter that of adulthood, but rather than progressing in a straightforward manner they hesitate, occupying for a variety of reasons this in-between state of liberation from rigidly defined roles. Turner has explained that van Gennep's paradigm applies to extra-ritual as well as ritual processes, to any moment when the actors moving "in accordance with a cultural script [are] liberated from normative demands, when they [are], indeed, betwixt and between successive lodgments in jural political systems. In this gap between ordered worlds almost anything may happen" (Turner, Dramas, 13). What I take as a position of resistance, functioning similarly to Foucault's concept of heterotopia, offers liminars the chance to stand outside and critique (explicitly or implicitly) the prevailing structure. Van Gennep's synthesis of ritual makes it clear that marriage is the most important social transition in virtually all cultures, and a change in marital status often has more significant implications for women, who tend to be defined by their relationships, than for men.

Sociologically speaking, liminality is dangerous but necessary. The liminar's status "becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification" (Turner, Dramas, 232), and therefore s/he eludes everyday controls. Jacqueline Urla defines the liminal as "those times or places that are outside of or on the threshold of ordinary structures with which we organize our lives" (Urla 101), which suggests that lives can be reorganized according to alternative structures. While threatening social chaos by challenging and redefining societal roles and definitions, liminality can usefully act as a form of release or catharsis. Turner reminds us that liminality is where "profane social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, [and] the social order may seem to have been turned upside down" (Turner, Ritual to Theatre, 27). It comprises a state outside of the normative structure that, when temporarily extended, may form what he calls "liminoid anti-structurality." In a successful transition, the liminar will leave behind that antistructural state, and be reincorporated through an enriching experience that revitalizes him/her and the community as a whole. My authors, however, do not allow such an unproblematically positive result, as we will see in the chapters to follow.

As Firmat has pointed out, the associations of liminality render it an extremely fertile term for critical study:

> etymologically, limen connects with nouns like limit, limb, limbo, limbus, slime, lintel; with verbs like limn, delimit, and eliminate; and with adjectives like preliminary, sublime, and subliminal. The suggestiveness of the word helps make the point that it is not possible

> to investigate liminality, even in van Gennep's restricted sense, without engaging a whole host of related ideas .... (Firmat xv)

The related ideas that concern me are, obviously, gender and power, and this dissertation investigates what it is about the liminal that renders the concept so seductive, particularly to women writers. Sarah Gilead writes that narration of liminal events can transform the literary work "into a tool for interrogating and re-imagining social values and power arrangements" (Gilead 306). My authors' use of the boundary does in fact critique prevalent gender arrangements and the disequilibria of power underlying the social institutions that govern their lives and the lives of their characters. Perhaps Turner's most important insight was to argue that, whereas for van Gennep the marge functions as a fleeting interstitial moment that is promptly resolved, it can in fact expand into a state in and of itself: liminality thus becomes synchronic/spatial, rather than solely diachronic/temporal. In this way, the actions of a heroine who locates herself outside a threatening binary structure can serve as an effective vehicle "for protesting coercive gender and social arrangements and for revealing the nexus between internal psychological conflict and social power cleavages" (Gilead 308).

Subjectivity must be understood at least partially as the control of one's own actual and figurative space, the ability for self-determination within parameters that one can establish and enforce. Mark Wigley has written that "identity theory is necessarily spatial theory" (Wigley 388), and this notion is particularly relevant to the female identities constructed by/through/despite boundaries in women-authored romance. As one recent critic has commented, "The peculiar demands made on women concerning the boundaries of their bodies seem to produce a more or less distinct division between an interior and an exterior" (Blaustein 33). Beatriz Colomina and other architectural theorists have observed that inside and outside exist only by virtue of the line that separates them, the liminal stress line that relates inner to outer, here to there, and that thereby renders any such distinction meaningful. Neither the interior nor the exterior exists unilaterally: "the interior and exterior are constructed simultaneously … the tension between inside and outside resides in the walls that divide them …" (Colomina 94). In order to analyze a given space and its occupation, we have by definition to analyze the limen that creates it, since "[t]o address the interior is to address the splitting of the wall" (Colomina 94).

Rosi Braidotti's notion of the nomad provides another thought-provoking critical source for conceptualizing a state of in-between-ness as a means of critiquing the dualistic structures that define the self in a phallocentric view of sexual relations. Drawing on Deleuze's notion of the "becoming-woman"; Irigaray's critique of the rational, "masculine" subject; and Harraway's image of the binary-destroying cyborg, Braidotti posits a nomadic female subject, allowing women a way out of the constricting either/or into the liberating both/and. My argument that certain female characters embody the boundary, in a paradoxical strategy of taking refuge within the otherwise damaging boundary line itself and existing instead as neither/nor, is usefully informed by this theory.

The "in-between" discipline[16] of Comparative Literature seems a natural fit for examining liminality. In my project, itself located at the interstices of Comparative Literature—Japanese, French, and English—; feminist literary criticism; anthropological theories of ritual; architectural theory; the philosophy of space developed by Lefebvre and Bachelard; Foucault's investigations into the agonistic nature of power; and the feminist geography of Rose and Geraldine Pratt, the threshold is presented as an important site of discourses about oppression and subversion. The texts I have chosen offer readers the opportunity to follow distinct and fascinating characters as they deal with and exploit the "existential liminality" (Bargen 220) of their femininity in order to circumvent the unfavourable binary oppositions they repeatedly encounter.

The Texts

A few remarks linking each of the texts to be analyzed to my broader theme of bounded bodies and embodied boundaries follow.

Genji Monogatari

As already indicated, the starting point for this dissertation is a tale written in Japan at the very beginning of the 11th century, in no small part because Heian literature[17] was the focus of my previous training and has long been a source of tremendous readerly satisfaction. Personal inclination and background were not, however, the only reasons for this decision. The Japanese world of letters is quite unique in world history, expressly valuing at a very early point in its history the literary production of many women authors and poets of genius, and so any theorizing of women's writing within the Comparative Literature context should at least make reference to that production. Works by Murasaki Shikibu and such contemporaries as Sei Shônagon or Izumi Shikibu have not as yet, however, been given their due in Western criticism. Granted, many non-Asian scholars cannot read modern Japanese, much less the classical language, but the implications that this neglect has for our comprehension of textualization by and of women are nonetheless serious, and the situation demands correction. The Genji Monogatari, a recognized masterpiece of not only Japanese but world literature overall, is after all readily available in versions by Arthur Waley, Edward Seidensticker, and (most recently) Royall Tyler, and so one can expect English-speaking readers in our field to be at least passingly familiar with it. My study will be based on the NKBZ (Shôgakkan) Japanese edition of the Genji, with translations supplied as appropriate.

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[16] In her contribution to the current discussion over how to reverse past isolationism and encourage more collaborative practices between English and Foreign Language departments, Sylvia Molloy writes that she began from the question: "why was it that we tended to think in binary terms, English and other, and what could we learn from comparative literature, from performance and media studies, from translation studies, all of them inspiring, intellectually provocative Mr. In-Betweens?" (Molloy 1235).

The tale is sprawling and gloriously populous—Japanese readers have recourse to a broad range of study guides designed to help them keep straight who's who and what happens when, and Tyler's translation, for instance (which comprises 1120 pages over two volumes), provides long lists of characters and how they are related to one another at the start of each of the 54 chapters. Throughout this monumental story, real and figurative boundaries of various sorts are employed to represent, address, and critique some of the problems at the root of infelicitous relations between its various men and women. Any number of earlier female characters presented themselves to my mind as candidates for analysis (and several will be referenced in the pages that follow), but my choice for in-depth study fell ultimately on Ukifune. Near the end of her work, Murasaki Shikibu offers us this final heroine who, rather than simply constructing or reacting to a boundary in her negotiations with an imbalance of power, herself actually becomes the boundary in a bid to reconcile the unsustainable dichotomies she experiences. Similarly to Turner's argument, the limen here functions as not an ephemeral phase through which the liminar passes, but rather a condition of fixity that she inhabits.

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[17] This period lasted from 794 to 1186, and is known as "Heian" because the capital city was located in Heian-kyô (present-day Kyoto) throughout those years.

The Genji as a whole is a work that refuses to remain within imposed bounds. It exists as both prose and poetry; as both text and image; as both a "classic" and manga (comic book) material; as both the bane of Japanese high-school students forced to struggle with its complex grammar and syntax and a vastly popular story attracting readers from all walks of life; as both undeniably ancient and incontrovertibly modern. As a world masterpiece, it transcends the time and place of its creation, appealing to a readership comprising drastically different ages, cultures, and mother tongues. Further, even subsequent to the demise of its main character, the story carries on for some 13 additional chapters, shifting the action in part to the new setting of Uji, peopled with additional characters. This text is, therefore, always already extending beyond, in terms of generations, storylines, readerly expectations, generic categories, and so on.

In her eponymous hero, Murasaki Shikibu shows us a man who on one very significant level knows no limits—he goes wherever and with whomever he likes, enjoying amorous adventures with women who are married and unmarried, young and old, high-born and low, even venturing into the rooms and very bed belonging to his father's favourite (his own step-mother). After Genji's death, we encounter with his successor and purported son, Kaoru, a somewhat more realistically drawn male, in that while still traversing barriers and disrespecting many of the physical and psychological boundaries that heroines such as Ôigimi and Nakanokimi seek to establish and maintain, he does not always prevail. The primary interest of the text, however, lies more in the wide range of complicated and captivating female lives than in those roving men who "discover" them.

Ukifune makes her appearance in the final chapters of the Genji, where characterization and insight benefit from a presumably more mature author, and all of what has come before is in some sense distilled into this one unforgettable heroine. An important term used by Murasaki Shikibu to describe Ukifune is *nakazora*, or "in mid-air." Ukifune lacks any firm grounding—she is, for example, neither fully royal nor fully commoner. Unlike Kaguyahime, the other-worldly princess of the earlier Taketori Monogatari (which another Genji character reads in search of answers to her own complex relationships), she is nonetheless fully woman, and cannot opt to escape masculine demands (or her own conflicted desire) by flying back to the moon. She must instead confront her all-too-human predicament directly. Chapter One explores Ukifune's ambivalent status (neither this nor that, neither here nor there, neither fully existing nor not existing, neither self nor other—precariously situated within a non-place, rather than occupying any place or full subject position at all), best expressed by a condition that Doris Bargen, in A Woman's Weapon, has termed "existential liminality" (Bargen 220). I will argue that Ukifune's existence shifts from marginal to liminal as she gains agency, eventually allowing her to subvert patriarchal authority, turning the tables on arbitrary male privilege, and forcing at least grudging acknowledgement of her unique, autonomous self. This female career stages for the reader a dynamic process toward a form of qualified empowerment, via a strategy whereby she stakes claim to and inhabits the dividing line between centre and margin, thereby destabilizing the rigid binary that has previously defined and constrained her life and relationships with others.

Eliduc

Once the decision had been made to open my discussion of embodied boundaries with Murasaki Shikibu, it seemed logical to turn next to a Western woman with a comparably long-standing status as a great storyteller and one who shares the same currency of courtly lovers and the impediments to their happiness. Marie de France, the twelfth-century author of chivalric romances, fills that role admirably. A long line of critics have read Eliduc, a later work, as the third and culminating stage in this author's exploration of amorous entanglements: namely, selfless, sacrificial love. My own interest, however, is with how this particular Old French lai directly urges the reader to question the implications of a withdrawal into liminal space by a woman who is faced with an unsustainable dichotomy that threatens her social, emotional, and even physical survival.

The temporal suspension employed by Eliduc's Guilliadun, the subject of Chapter Two, operates as a fascinating example of boundary appropriation as a paradoxical plan for achieving empowerment. True to romantic form, the heroine of this lai marries the handsome, courageous hero and sets off with him for a life of wedded bliss. However, just before landing at her new husband's country, she falls into a coma upon learning of his pre-existing wife (whose prior claims thus render their own marriage invalid). In so doing, she for all intents and purposes freezes time until either the situation becomes resolved or she is forced to choose death. How else is a young woman to respond on hearing that her lover—the man to whom she has sacrificed her virginity, for whom she has left home and family, and to whose protection she has entrusted herself for both a dangerous sea journey and a new life among strangers in an unfamiliar land—already possesses a bride? Far from naïve, Guilliadun is acutely conscious of the untenable situation in which Eliduc's reprehensible behaviour has placed her: "vileinment descunseillee / M'ad en autre tere laissee / Trahie m'ad, ne sai quei deit. / Mut est fole qui humme creit" (Marie de France ll. 1081-84).

There are, of course, few courses of action available to Guilliadun as wife/not-wife, forced into what amounts to social and sexual liminality. She cannot take up arms to defend herself and her honour or even elect to return alone to her homeland, as would a man who had been similarly betrayed. Faced with what one critic has seen as "the traditional suppression and containment of the female" in the world described by both Marie de France and Murasaki Shikibu (Ho 133), she shrewdly opts for a further, self-induced restraint. Because nothing can reverse what has already happened, her response is to place herself in stasis by experiencing an extended fainting spell that functions to emphasize the existentially liminal status of this female character, unable to move either forward or back. What readers should recognize here is that suspension of action is not equivalent to lack of action, in that what appears to be a passive swoon in fact turns out to be a successful method of finding closure for an impossible situation. Eliduc is forced to pay remorseful tribute to his comatose lover, with the eventual result that the first wife renounces her rights and yields legal status to Guilliadun, who promptly awakens. With this story, Marie de France takes the superficially disempowered position of the in-between and shows how it can actually (and thought-provokingly) be employed as a source of agency.

The romance creates a world both like and unlike the reader's own; as a work of imagination, "it oversteps the limits by which life is normally bounded" (Beer 3). Fated by their sex to become little more than decorative brides for men, heroines of romance frequently seem to lead overtly bounded lives, doomed to a reactive rather than proactive role. It has been said that "the life of the female savage is freedom itself … compared with the increasing constriction of custom closing in upon the woman, as civilization advances, like the iron torture chamber of romance" (Gilman 65). This literary mode, with rigidly defined sex roles and female boundaries regularly penetrated by heroes, offers the so-called fairer sex little opportunity for enjoyment of freedom or security. Chapter Two will demonstrate how Marie de France allows Guilliadun to achieve her goal of security by more or less stepping outside temporal bounds and the constrictions of custom. Whereas, as we will see in Chapter One, Ukifune's entire life is tinged with liminality, in this case the limen appears in a discrete episode. The fact that Guilliadun does employ occupation of the threshold as a strategy for resolving her crisis, however, renders the medieval Eliduc a fascinating point of comparison with the Uji chapters of the Genji and their final heroine.

A Simple Story

The next stop on the trajectory of my dissertation moves us forward some 600 years, to the heady decades that saw the expansion of the English novel.[18] By the 1780s and 90s, this popular genre was attracting a tremendous amount of interest, with men and women acting in the capacity of both writer and reader. The traditional view takes Defoe as father of the novel, and downplays or even ignores the extensive contributions made by female authors. Much feminist scholarship in English literature has since the 1970s been devoted, therefore, to the recuperation of lost or once discredited novelists, especially from the prolific 18th century: Eliza Haywood, Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, and Frances Burney, to supply but a few examples.[19] My selection from this very important moment in the development of women's literature is a work by Elizabeth Inchbald, an actress and highly respected dramatist, novelist and critic. Her first novel, A Simple Story, begun in 1777, but not published for some 14 years, is (despite the title) a complex and fascinating study of power struggles between the sexes.

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[18] Paula R. Backscheider in fact argues for the novel itself to be considered "liminal space." She writes that early prose fiction had neither public nor private status and exploited its dual consciouness--that "conform[ing] to the rules, assumptions, and practices of neither sphere," it evolved as "places of discovery and change" (Backscheider 18). I will return to her arguments in Chapter 3.

[19] See, for example, the pioneering work of Dale Spender (Mothers of the Novel), Ellen Moers (Literary Women), and Elaine Showalter (A Literature of Their Own), and countless recently published books and articles, many of which will be referred to during the discussion.

In Masquerade and Civilization, Terry Castle has written of A Simple Story in the most glowing terms. She calls it "the most elegant English fiction of the century," and continues:

> The emotional exactitude, the subtlety of imaginative statement, make it one of the finest novels of any period. Inchbald shares the profound interiority of Jane Austen and Henry James…. Yet here too, paradoxically, is the same freedom—the exquisite extremism—one associates with Emily Brontë. (Castle 290-91)

Chapter Three will explore the "exquisite extremism" symbolized by the embodied boundary motif with regard to Lady Matilda, a character who, like Ukifune and Guilliadun, experiences and eventually learns to exploit a strikingly liminal sort of survival. This heroine of the novel's Part II is seen to be existing literally on the edge, forced to remain withdrawn from the public world of men, and yet unable or perhaps unwilling to settle into an unambivalent space free or independent of the borderline. Owing to the infidelity and subsequent flight of her mother (a Miss Milner, whose own interesting story in narrated in Part I), Matilda has been raised apart from her father, the austere and inflexible Lord Elmwood. Left suddenly motherless as an adolescent, she is offered shelter in the paternal home on condition that she is not seen to be living there and that her presence is never even alluded to. Existing, therefore, as an almost haunting figure inhabiting a kind of parallel universe within an isolated suite of rooms, allowed access to the main part of the house only during

Elmwood's absence, throughout most of her story this heroine is and simultaneously is not.

Whereas Castle and others read Matilda as an unspoiled version of Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood, taking her mother's place for a happier marriage and future life, Patricia Meyer Spacks offers a more negative reading that sees Matilda's story as "not a narrative of female freedom and power, but one of necessary acceptance and limited reconciliation" (Spacks 199). My own interpretation is that Inchbald offers greater nuance than either of these viewpoints allow. Matilda's possibilities for marital bliss are undermined by all of the preceding action in the novel, and yet Rushbrook's and especially her own character—raised in "that school of prudence—though of adversity" (Inchbald 338)—intimate a not unsuccessful union. However, the author deliberately brings this novel to a close without offering a resolution, leaving both heroine and reader on the doorstep, suspended at the young woman's moment of decision.

The spaces on either side of the boundary can, for Matilda and her counterparts in the Genji Monogatari, Eliduc, and The House of Mirth, be viewed as "anti-spaces," which, being "constrictive and morbid […], signify a stagnation that opposes movement" (Bronfen, Richardson, 15) and even survival itself, and thus do not constitute feasible options. Like the other characters I discuss, Matilda is aware that open defiance serves merely to reinforce the arbitrary and often utterly ruthless power under which she suffers, and thus seeks other means of establishing subjecthood. Terry Kawashima, in a recent book on margins and gender in Heian and Kamakura-era Japanese literature, problematizes our sometimes complacent understanding of this motif by asking: "is the margin always a passive victim of oppression?" (Kawashima 2). For these heroines, the margin or, more specifically, the limen separating marginal from central, on the contrary serves as a means of at least qualified liberation for an active agent, a space from within which subjectivity can be constructed and expressed.

The House of Mirth

Having already ranged from Asia to Europe and from the 11th century to the 18th, it seemed logical in my fourth and final chapter to set sail again so as to examine a work by a woman of the New World. I therefore pull ashore at the year 1905 and Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth. Wharton is a celebrated American writer of the novel of manners, one who unshirkingly exposes the corruption and other ills at the heart of society and its marital and other cultural practices. Like the authors dealt with in chapters one through three, she is profoundly interested in her female characters and the choices they are forced to make, what has been termed: "the tensions between private desires and public codes of behavior" (Benstock, "Introduction," 18). This novel is one of Wharton's finest for its ironic delineation of the harmful values and limitations imposed upon a young woman of marriageable age, and the psychological and physical effects these may have on her.

The principle ingredients of any romance are adventure and love. Where a hero is the focus, we typically have a quest plot, full of travel and excitement; for a heroine, the marriage plot supervenes, indicative of women's more limited horizon. A classic example of a liminal stage from the anthropological perspective is that of courtship, the set of rituals whereby young people are supposed to make the transition from childhood to adulthood via socially sanctioned betrothal and wedlock. My examples of women-authored romance all subvert the reader's expectations in this regard. Ukifune flees her two insistent and very attractive, perhaps too attractive, suitors; Guilliadun confronts her bigamous spouse, without seeming to do so, and forces a vitally important choice; and we abruptly bid good-bye to Matilda as she is considering a proposal, an authorial aside (laden with Austen-like irony) commenting that, if she accepts, the reader "has every reason to suppose their wedded life was a life of happiness" (Inchbald 337). Likewise, The House of Mirth employs an ingenious liminality with regard to male-female relations, with the heroine in this case looking to sidestep an unwanted or even unthinkable development.

In Chapter Four, we encounter the enigmatic Lily Bart, who from start to finish never quite manages to move beyond her temporary role as "une jeune fille à marier," with its attendant withholding of subjectivity and agency. Even at the age of 29, she remains a "girl," given that the term "woman" in her world implies the married status she never achieves, and thus is barred from attaining the postliminal standing needed for safe negotiation of life and its dangers. Whereas Ukifune finds herself caught between two men (Kaoru and Niou), and Guilliadun between the status of maid and wife, or even wife and "whore," Lily is trapped between a single womanhood that cannot be sustained (she has none of the money, social status, or family backing needed to make her own, independent life) and countless potential marriages that, equally undesirable, all slip through her fingers.

Many have noted that she is ever in transit, her stunning figure set off against temporary settings from the train station in the opening scene to the shabby hotel room at the close. In several ways, Lily is Braidotti's nomad, uneasily nowhere at home, but unwilling to make the compromises required to mend her fractured subjectivity and inhabit the place allotted her by societal forces. Following an unsettled childhood spent being shuttled from Manhattan to Newport to various European capitals, she is orphaned and taken in by a disapproving relative, the ever-respectable widow Mrs. Peniston. The haven promised by wealthy Aunt Julia's house, however, is compromised, in that even in her own room Lily always feels like a transient occupant. Her life remains a precarious one, involving an unending round of extended visits to the homes of friends and acquaintances, struggling to find the funds required to finance her proper preparation for and presentation to the marriage market. The seal on her writing paper may read "Beyond!", but Lily never actually progresses because all destinations on offer are too potentially suffocating.[20] As one critic writes, "[o]nly in fantasy can she make herself into a queen of infinite space, and in fantasy she prefers to dwell" (Clubbe 543). While ostensibly continuing to play her part in the game of catching a rich husband, Lily always seems to fold her hand at the moment of proof, unwilling to accept the terms and conditions of "winning." In her own way, she joins Ukifune, Guilliadun, and Matilda in seeking refuge within a fantastical space of existential liminality.

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[20] Wai-Chee Dimock is among those who have pointed out that Wharton's "house of mirth has no exit" (Dimock 791).

What does it mean to be a young woman dealing with the demands and perils of romance in the world of the Heian Genji... in the chivalric lai of Medieval Europe… in an English country house of the 18th century… or in the New York of old money, and equally old paternalistic traditions, at the turn of the 20th? If these texts are to be taken seriously, with a willingness to read the powerful messages at their core, it certainly does not mean to acquiesce yieldingly to one's own oppression or to accept a marginal role when one requires full subjectivity. If there is anything in common among Murasaki Shikibu, Marie de France, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Edith Wharton (and I believe there is), it is the desire to write, and to write honestly, of the unsustainable, insupportable choices patriarchal society offers the romance heroine, and that she may reject in favour of a liminal space of her own. I do not seek to annihilate the differences of these authors and texts, but rather to identify the similarities within that difference, while acknowledging the differences within that similarity. As Hélène Cixous once wrote: "Impossible de définir une pratique féminine de l'écriture, d'une impossibilité qui se maintiendra car on ne pourra jamais théoriser cette pratique, l'enfermer, la coder, ce qui ne signifie pas qu'elle n'existe pas" (Cixous 45). All of the heroines analyzed in this dissertation are created by their authors as sexually available young women, which fact crystallizes their shared dilemma: having irretrievably left childhood behind, they need to cross the threshold and take their rightful place as adult subjects, but to do that they must apparently wed or be otherwise given to a man. In this context, the subsequent retreat to, and in fact embrace of, the in-between state of liminality underscores their ambivalence toward that fateful step, and their awareness that the social subject established by means of the marital tie remains dependent and provisional, if not utterly illusory.

"One of the most exciting features of contemporary literary studies is the fact that all periods as well as all places are up for fresh examination and open to new configurations" (Damrosch 17). That optimistic claim justifies my own comparative and, I believe, freshly innovative configuration based on an important aspect of women's writing in a number of periods and places: the fact that each of these authors employ the boundary (marge or limen) as a site of feminine, if not necessarily feminist, resistance. It is worth recalling that the comparatist has been defined as one who "works at the edge of the matter" (Higonnet 155). The methodology and subject matter of this project are both located on what I view as a highly productive edge, a site of liberation from hierarchical and arbitrary divisions that tend to confine and limit. While some might argue that this is rather too narrow and treacherous a positioning for comfort, it is my view that both the literary and any worthwhile criticism thereof lie precisely in detail and risk. As Saussy insightfully reminds us: "the literariness of literature has a lot to do with focusing, giving disproportionate attention to small things" (Saussy, ACLA Report, 28). Small things such as subtle yet potent images of bounded bodies and embodied boundaries in the writing of a woman's experience of courtship and gendered relationships deserve focused attention and are in fact of vital concern to all who care about literature and what it can tell us about ourselves.

Nakazora, or "In Mid-Air": The Existential Liminality of Ukifune

> Femme n'aie peur ni d'ailleurs,
> ni de même, ni d'autre.
> - Cixous, "Le rire de la Méduse"

Rereading the Genji Monogatari

The literature of Japan, far from "a blank space ready to be adopted or assimilated by Comparative Literature," has long been an established "site … of production of knowledge" (Chow 108) for Japanese readers and scholars. The Genji Monogatari (源氏物語; known in English as The Tale of Genji) is no exception. An enormous body of native scholarship has built up over the millennium since this text's inception,[21] and scores of new titles appear annually in Japanese, as do many in English and other languages. This masterpiece has been at least potentially a part of the world literature corpus for some 70 years, with numerous important studies already published in the West (e.g., Bargen, Field, Okada, and Shirane). Nevertheless, the transcultural comparative project attempted in this dissertation can usefully and dynamically serve to highlight the significance of certain textual aspects whose implications are less obvious when the work is studied either in isolation (i.e., not juxtaposed with other texts) or set solely within Japan's own literary context. This chapter will accordingly examine the motif of liminality with regard to the character of Ukifune, setting the stage for subsequent chapters that turn to heroines from other literatures and elaborate on how and why the limen is made to function as a site of subjectivity and agency in several examples of women's writing of courtship narratives.

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[21] Such analysis actually begins ca. 1200 with the Mumyôzôshi (無名草子; literally "untitled book"), attributed to Shunzei Kyô no Musume (Shunzei's Daughter). The earliest extant piece of Japanese prose criticism, the Mumyôzôshi praises the Genji as something "that cannot be the work of an ordinary being" (Marra 137) and deems it "the most difficult thing to give up in this world" (Marra 133)–above the moon, the Lotus Sutra, even the Namu Amida Buddha or Nenbutsu chant.

To many readers, the primary interest of the Genji resides in the fascinating, otherwise hidden female lives that the peripatetic, intrusive behaviour of the male characters exposes to view. By focusing on a broad range of women and their responses to overtures both welcome and unwelcome and to relationships of shorter or longer duration, effectively demoting her "hero" to the status of medium, author Murasaki Shikibu decentres social hierarchies and places the marginal at centre stage. (As will be shown in later chapters, a similar effect is achieved in all the texts of women's writing examined in this dissertation.) As sequestered women, not circulating in either the public sphere or the pages of history, their stories remain unread unless and until masculine notice allows them metaphorically to escape their confines and be made known to others. The entire tale in fact makes use of various boundaries, both real and figurative, to represent, address, and critique aspects of the often fraught relations between the sexes. In the social structure described by the Genji, women remained immured for much of their lives, denied access to the outside world and allowed few outlets for self-expression. Therefore, the onus was necessarily on men (who unilaterally enjoyed freedom of movement) to come calling and, by doing so, to connect these inmates with the outside world.[22] (This is not to deny that some women lived and worked at the court, clearly circulating in public;

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[22] Sei Shônagon describes the pathetic situation of a woman in a matrilocal marriage who finds herself abandoned: "With much bustle and excitement a young man has moved into the house of a certain family as the daughter's husband. One day he fails to come home, and it turns out that some high-ranking Court lady has taken him as her lover. How depressing! 'Will he ever tire of the woman and come back to us?' his wife's family wonder ruefully" (Morris, Pillow Book, 41).

nevertheless, the more typical Heian noblewoman would have resided at home throughout her lifetime.)

When women are left to languish alone indoors for indefinite periods, when communication between the sexes is conducted via an exchange of letters and poems or, at more intimate moments, through blinds and curtains, normally in conditions of at least semi-darkness, the importance of gendered spaces and their delineation is undeniable and worthy of critical attention. Of course, no woman's private space is immune to the threat of invasion by licentious prowlers. Pregnability, of female homes and female bodies, is a major motif in the Genji Monogatari[23] and indeed in other women-authored Classical Japanese texts.[24] Early chapters of Murasaki Shikibu's masterwork play repeatedly on this theme of spatial vulnerability, with Genji intruding upon Fujitsubo at both the palace and her family home; spying on the innocent young Murasaki as she plays with her pet bird and is scolded by her grandmother; making his way through an overgrown garden and sadly dilapidated estate to an unsuspecting Suetsumuhana, who has been virtually forgotten by the world; bursting into private rooms and bodily carrying off a weeping, protesting Utsusemi; and so on. As one article neatly comments, "the insubstantiality of Heian residential architecture and the penetrability of courtyard gardens prove to be important catalysts in the story's plot" (Coats 56).

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[23] What Firmat writes about liminality in the Spanish text he is analyzing applies here as well: "*Bajar, subir, escalar*: one of the striking things about Don Juan Tenorio is that it is full of walls that neither enclose nor exclude, of prisons that do not imprison, of doors that do not protect from intrusion, of barriers that do not bar access. The play's borders, its barriers and limits, are observed mostly in the breaches that the characters make in them" (Firmat 10).

[24] For an examination of the themes of intrusion and violation as employed by Fujiwara no Michitsuna no Haha, coincidentally a great-aunt of Murasaki Shikibu, the psychological introspection of whose "diary" is understood to have had significant impact on the latter's own literary style, see Henitiuk, "Walls, Curtains and Screens: Spatio-Sexual Metaphor in the Kagerô Nikki." Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this dissertation will explore how certain women writers from other times and places engage metaphorically with analogous circumstances of female vulnerability under patriarchy.

Nonetheless, while these women are normally confined to the interior through social customs that forbid their exposure to the male gaze and bar them from an active role in the public, political realm, and while they may at first glance appear passive and acquiescent when faced with masculine brazenness, they are nonetheless not completely defenceless. Women were ensconced behind gates and walls, doors and screens, blinds and curtains; their bodies were draped in multiple layers of fabric and their faces concealed behind elaborate fans and extremely long hair; lamps were carefully placed to shield them from prying eyes. While their control of domestic and corporeal boundaries is compromised on occasion, it remains true that Heian noblewomen are generally accorded the privilege of determining whether others will or will not have access to their spaces. Accordingly, when violation occurs or is threatened (as happens repeatedly—such events serving as prime motivators of the plot), a sense of righteous indignation is only to be expected. Much of the spatial metaphor in the Genji revolves around images of incursion and retreat, as women seek to fortify the parameters that are supposed to accord them some degree of autonomy, and yet all too often fail to do so.

In the final part of the story, known as the Uji chapters, all of what has come before is in some sense distilled into one unforgettable female "outcast" (Bargen 211), who ultimately rejects the rite of passage that would see her become a man's concubine and thus subject to his whims and at risk of abandonment and humiliation. In refusing to take her socially assigned place in relation to one of the men pursuing her, Ukifune unilaterally destabilizes the rigid binary of empowerment and disempowerment that has previously defined her life and dealings with others. Where earlier female characters had simply constructed a protective boundary or reacted to an imposed one in their negotiations with a power imbalance, this last heroine actually inhabits the boundary, in an innovative act of resistance to being contained within or excluded from categories defined and controlled by others. While there has been a tradition of ascribing the chapters in which she appears to another author (candidates put forward have included Murasaki Shikibu's own daughter), my reading sides with those by critics such as Komashaku Kimi who have taken Ukifune's story as representing a powerful form of closure (albeit problematized, as will be discussed below) to the discussion of an impressive breadth of female lives that in fact constitutes the Genji. I argue that this character's "existential liminality" (Bargen 220) functions as a logical culmination of the difficult and often paradoxical relationship between women and boundaries presented throughout the entire tale. Ukifune is able to subvert patriarchal authority as she stages a dynamic process toward female empowerment, effectively reconciling the irreconcilable at the moment of her life crisis (to borrow Victor Turner's term[25]) by slipping out of the constraining bounds of her hitherto painful existence and seizing control of her life.

Ukifune is pressured to undergo a series of liminal transformations throughout her lifetime. Her story is primarily one of a disempowered female repeatedly and unrelentingly displaced by other, often less than benevolent, forces as they try to force her to become what she is not or is not prepared to be. From infancy, Ukifune is ruthlessly shunted aside; suffering paternal rejection that denies her any share in her father's world of comparative status and comfort, she is refused access to any stable social station. Her entire life has been spent on the margin and will apparently continue there, by which means Murasaki Shikibu reveals the precariousness of women's place and security under patriarchy. Men may vie for their favours in a form of courtly romance, but, because they always maintain the upper hand, cannot be trusted to respect the needs and desires of their conquests. Accordingly, in her search for a more equitable role than that which such harmful marginalization allows, and in a bid to reinvent herself and the available choices, liminalization becomes her chosen strategy. Mihai Spariosu, in his The Wreath of Wild Olive: Play, Liminality, and the Study of Literature (1997), usefully distinguishes between the marginal and the liminal as follows:

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[25] In the introduction to The Forest of Symbols, Turner defines a life crisis as "an important point in the physical or social development of an individual, such as birth, puberty, or death," involving "changes in the relationships of all the people connected with them by ties of blood, marriage, cash, political control, and in many other ways" (Turner, Forest of Symbols, 7). Ukifune's crisis of choosing clearly functions as such a liminal event.

> Marginality refers to an agonistic relation (between the center and the margins of a structure, system, subsystem, polysystem, or world), whereas liminality refers to a neutral relation … , such as obtains, say, in a no-man's land between two or more state borders. Marginality cannot provide access to or initiate new worlds, whereas liminality can do both. … In my view, therefore, liminality can both subsume and transcend a dialectic of margin and center. (Spariosu 38)

During her preliminal state, this "peripheral wom[a]n" (Sarra 141) or "homeless one" (Field, Splendor, 296) is used as a mere pawn shuffled here and there by both family and lovers; others have their own agenda with regard to a postliminal state they would like to impose upon the young woman. By the end of the tale, however, Ukifune finally learns to initiate something like Spariosu's new world, whereby she can gain access to stability and autonomy.

This eventual empowerment is achieved through embodying the limen, as she seeks refuge within a third space independent of damaging social dichotomies, transcending that centre/margin dialectic. At a critical moment of transition, Ukifune opts to reject the male-privileging passage and the necessarily weak and restricting postliminal state it would offer her. The conditions under which she has existed have become increasingly unsustainable and she sees little or no chance to wield the agency she requires to thrive or even survive. She therefore chooses to absent herself from those inherently hostile spaces and turn inward: inhabiting a sphere of solitude, concentrating her energies on her own self as centre, crafting a safe, autonomous world within the liminal phase itself.

Ukifune's claiming of the boundary that has (over-)determined her life is a paradoxical effort to establish more rigid bounds around her person, in recognition of the fact that she, as fatherless female of marriageable age, is not only problematically severed from the patriarchal structure but also consequently at the mercy of others. Her very existence has been excessively fluid, situated between worlds not of her own making, demonstrating how vulnerable even relatively highborn women may find themselves. She therefore withdraws from the insupportable situation controlled by the men surrounding her and governed by their self-serving plans and ambitions to what functions as a neutral territory. On one level, the withdrawal is into a non-gendered world of religious contemplation, in that she joins a Buddhist community.

On another, more significant level, however, her actions constitute a definitively feminine protest: she locates herself within an isolated, anonymous, private space where she hopes to evade invasion and control by the pursuing male, who to this point has proven inescapable. This chapter argues that Ukifune's dynamic escape is staged through an embodiment of the limen, which despite its superficial passivity allows her (in Bachelard's terms) the space at least potentially to prepare her own subjecthood.

Background

Few facts are available regarding author Murasaki Shikibu: her exact dates of birth and death are a mystery, as is even her real name ("Murasaki" derives from a character in the Genji and "Shikibu" was at one time her father's title within the Bureau of Rites).[26] We do know that she lived during the height of Japan's Heian period (i.e., 8th through 12th centuries), a peaceful time of great cultural flourishing, and belonged to a minor branch of the powerful Fujiwara clan. This provincial governor's daughter was married relatively late in life according to the custom of the day (i.e., in the year 999 CE, when she is assumed to have been in her early twenties) to Fujiwara Nobutaka, a colleague and contemporary of her father's who had at least one adult son. She gave birth to a daughter and was widowed within two years.

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[26] We will later see how the Genji's fictional characters do not possess personal names, but here I would simply like to point out that the names of aristocratic Heian women (with the exception of empresses, mothers of emperors, and high priestesses) did not get recorded for posterity. Instead, women are commonly identified by reference to a male relation. For example, a list of important authors from the period must include such functionally anonymous ascriptions as Michitsuna no Haha (Michitsuna's Mother), Takasue no Musume (Takasue's Daughter), and Sei Shônagon (whose appellation consists of an alternate reading of the family name Kiyowara and a title her father once held).

Murasaki Shikibu came from a scholarly family that had produced a long line of literary figures, and her own precocious gifts had been recognized in early childhood. The rival courts surrounding the two consorts of Emperor Ichijô (r. 986-1011) were at the time vying for the presence of talented noblewomen to increase their level of popularity among the courtiers and consequently their imperial favour, and Empress Teishi's circle already boasted the services of Sei Shônagon, famed today for her Makura no Sôshi, or Pillow Book. Murasaki accordingly entered the service of Empress Shôshi as a lady-in-waiting sometime around 1007. This was a highly cultured salon, which included Akazome Emon, a poet and possibly also the author of the Eiga Monogatari (a historical narrative about Fujiwara no Michinaga, Shôshi's father, translated by William and Helen Craig McCullough as A Tale of Flowering Fortunes) and Izumi Shikibu, often called the greatest waka[27] poet of her time. Our author likely owed her post to an already established reputation in both prose and poetry circles.[28] The Heian court comprised a unique situation in the pre-modern world (and much of the modern as well) of artistic "spaces of and for women [where they] wrote for each other and for posterity in highly literate and mutually critical and competitive contexts" (Okada 162-63), a situation that cannot help but be of interest to all those intrigued by the conditions of female literary production throughout history. As Richard Bowring has noted, it "is truly remarkable … that a number of court women were able to write about their situation in such a fashion that their predicament speaks directly to us today, across barriers of time and place" (Bowring xvii). The texts that Murasaki and her contemporaries wrote do indeed continue to offer readers tremendous insight into how the female sex lived and loved in Heian Japan, as well as how and with what intent authors may choose to textualize these lives.

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[27] Waka (和歌) literally means "Japanese poetry/song" as opposed to Chinese. Japanese verse forms at this time include chôka (long poems, with alternating lines of 5 and 7 syllables) and sedôka (short poems with a 5-7-7, 5-7-7 syllable count). The reference here is to the more restricted category of 31-syllable poems in the form of 5-7-5-7-7, popular both in Heian times and the modern day, when they became known as tanka. (Virtually all of the poetry found in the Genji Monogatari consists of this 31-syllable form.)

[28] In addition to the Genji Monogatari, we have of her oeuvre a collection of 120 poems known as the Murasaki Shikibu Shû (The Poetry Collection of Murasaki Shikibu) and the Murasaki Shikibu Nikki, a sort of journal covering approximately 15 months of the time the author lived at the palace.

The strong interest demonstrated throughout the Genji on women who belong to neither the highest nor the lowest ranks of nobility, although both these groups are certainly represented, is partially explained by the fact that Murasaki Shikibu was herself a middle-ranked woman. This focus on women of what is a rather insecure standing is announced early in the story, during the "Rainy Night Conversation" (see Abe 1:129-67; T:21-35; S:20-38[29]), a famous passage during which Genji and a group of youths, including his best friend Tô no Chûjô, discuss their amorous adventures. They debate the attractions of the two extremes of shina takaku or "highborn rank" and shimo no kizami to iû kiwa or "that considered of lower status" and, in the end, agree that, to romance-seeking males, the naka no shina or "those in the middle" (1:134; T:23; S:22) have the most to recommend them. Ukifune, as the unrecognized daughter of an imperial prince and stepdaughter to a provincial governor, and whose mother is herself of the middle ranks, counts among those who fall in between, although of course she does not make an appearance until very much later in the story.

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[29] Citations from the original Japanese text will refer to the Shôgakkan or NKBZ version, edited by Abe Akio et al., cited by volume and page number, with additional reference provided to page numbers in the two most recent complete English versions (with Tyler's referred to as T and Seidensticker's as S). Translations, except where otherwise noted, are my own.

It is commonly claimed that the Genji Monogatari is about a certain Prince Genji, the perfect lover, and his numerous adventures, but that gratifyingly simple description is far from satisfactory or even accurate. For one thing, this character dies about two-thirds of the way through the tale and is succeeded by young men of the subsequent generation well before the Ukifune storyline that concerns us here even begins. Further, much recent criticism in both East and West has read the tale as about its female characters. In my view, it is difficult to take the Genji as anything other than a woman writer's highly gender-inflected revision of the traditional narrative paradigm, which follows the admirable exploits of an irresistible male. Recent scholarship, especially that adopting a feminist critical stance against what has been called "centuries of androcentric interpretation" (Buckley 88), has also directly challenged earlier readings of Genji as an idealized lover by highlighting the ironic tone and decided critique of his behaviour that is implicit in many scenes. For the purposes of providing a readable synopsis of this expansive tale, my next few paragraphs will employ the main male characters as each a sort of thread drawing readers along from one captivating heroine to another, which is my preferred reading of the overall organization of this text.

Hikaru Genji (the "Shining" Genji)—a convenient moniker readers have hung on him, given that characters in this text do not have names per se[30]—, the son of the

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[30] Genji (源氏) is an alternate reading of Minamoto, a surname accorded to members of the royal family barred from succession. In the original, which does not normally employ anything corresponding to personal names, he is usually referred to according to his office, which naturally shifts as his career advances. This character is thus identified initially as Chûjô (Captain) and later as Sangi (Consultant), Udaishô (Commander of the Right), Gon Dainagon (Acting Grand Counsellor), Naidaijin (Palace Minister), and Ôkiotodo (Chancellor). Other "names" in the tale are similarly nebulous. Female characters tend to be identified by their past or current place of residence (e.g., Akashi no Kimi = the Lady from Akashi province; Rokujô no Miyasudokoro = the Haven living on Sixth Avenue; haven is an unofficial title for an intimate of an Emperor or Heir Apparent); by their

Emperor and a concubine lacking the strong family backing that would be necessary to propose her child for the throne, loses his mother at a tender age and spends the rest of his life seeking her substitute. His first serious affair is with Fujitsubo, a stepmother who closely resembles the lost mother, but many other women play important roles. Genji is married several times (his is a polygynous society, although it was rare for a real-life Heian man to have more than one or two wives at any given time). Significant unions include a formal marriage at the age of twelve to the slightly older Aoi, proud daughter of the powerful Sadaijin or Minister of the Left—this relationship is not an affective success, although it does serve to bolster his political standing and produce a son (Yûgiri); a rather more atypical marriage to a disingenuous young girl known as Waka Murasaki (later Murasaki no Ue) whom he kidnaps and raises to be the ideal wife, although she remains childless to the end; and a more or less mundane marriage to an always cautious and independently minded woman (Akashi no Kimi) whom he meets while exiled to rustic Harima province, but who nonetheless gives him the greatest prize: a daughter.[31] Lastly, quite late in life, a childlike, immature princess (known as Onna San no Miya or the Third Princess) becomes his highest-ranking wife, officially displacing all others, including the previously unassailable Murasaki, but she takes Buddhist orders at a shockingly

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own or a male family member's court rank/office (e.g., Mistress of the Wardrobe, the title of the character otherwise known as Tamakazura); by birth order, as in appellations such as First Princess or Ôigimi and Nakanokimi (elder and younger sister, respectively); or by reference to an image in a poem (this is the most common and is, in fact, Ukifune's case).

[31] The Heian aristocracy valued female children higher than male because of the possibility of the maternal grandfather gaining a position of considerable power, provided that the daughter can be married into the Imperial Family and produce an heir.

young age, after having given birth to a son by another man.[32] Along the way are affairs with a great variety of women who all remain unforgettable (to both "hero" and reader) in their respective ways, and a career that sees Genji ultimately attain the unprecedented (fictional) post of Jundaijôtennô or Honorary Retired Emperor and live surrounded by myriad wives, concubines, and former lovers.

With one third of the story left to go, he dies. We have no death scene—the 42nd Nioumiya chapter[33] (匂宮, rendered as "The Perfumed Prince" in Tyler and "His Perfumed Highness" in Seidensticker) opens abruptly following an eight-year lapse with the enigmatic words:光隠れたまひにし後, *hikari kakuretamainishi nochi*, "his light was now hidden, and…" (5:11; T:785; S:735). From this point on, the new "heroes" of the tale are a pair of close friends and companions: Kaoru, Genji's purported son by the Third Princess, and Prince Niou, his grandchild by that all-important daughter mentioned above, who is now reigning Empress.

Niou is something of an irrepressible rake, whereas Kaoru is of such a sober bent that he shuns virtually all of the dalliances typical for a young man of his class and advantages and seriously contemplates joining the priesthood. His desire for religious instruction leads him to Uji, south of the capital city of Heian-kyô (modern-day Kyoto), where a widowed half-cleric by the name of Hachi no Miya or the Eighth Prince (Genji's younger half-brother) lives with his two beautiful and highly talented daughters. Kaoru falls in love with the elder, Ôigimi, but she rebuffs his advances, urging a union between him and her younger sister instead. Kaoru foils her plans by introducing to their home under cover of night the dashing Niou, who promptly takes the sister, Nakanokimi, as his unofficial wife. Unable to resist Kaoru's importunings any other way, and deeply saddened by what she sees as Niou's fickleness in not living up to his promises of devotion and her own presumed complicity in her sibling's present unhappiness (their now deceased father had urged wariness in their dealings with men), Ôigimi stops eating and gradually dies.[34] Niou moves the soon pregnant Nakanokimi to the capital, professing undying love. Shortly thereafter, however, he is obliged by his parents to marry a more suitably high-ranking woman (Yûgiri's Sixth Daughter), which fact, coupled with his continued philandering, means that Nakanokimi must remain unceasingly vigilant in order to safeguard her social position and their child's future.[35] Under pressure from the Emperor, Kaoru weds his Second Princess, who is married off to this commoner (albeit a highly attractive commoner) because, despite being so well born, she is politically disadvantaged owing to a lack of support from highly placed males in her maternal family.

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[32] For a speculative reading of this character's childishness as a deliberate strategy for avoiding full participation in the deleterious sexual politics of her society, see Henitiuk, "Seeking Refuge in Prepubescent Space."

[33] There is no evidence to show whether Murasaki Shikibu chose these titles herself.

A long-lost half-sister turns up, the result of a secret affair the Eighth Prince had had with his late wife's niece and attendant (Chûjô). This is the lovely Ukifune, who was raised primarily in the rural provinces, but is now living in Heian-kyô and has been brought to stay with Nakanokimi for a short time. Niou quickly sniffs her out, with the result that Nakanokimi, in a bid to forestall both her husband's libidinous tendencies and Kaoru's rising interest in herself, deflects the latter's attention to Ukifune, proposing her instead as a look-alike replacement for the dead Ôigimi. Ukifune, who has by this time fled to a supposedly secret location, is pursued by the two men and promptly abducted by Kaoru. He installs her back at the Uji villa but, while this former would-be ascetic busies himself with renovating his city residence to receive his conquest, Niou begins making secret and not wholly unwelcome visits. Ukifune becomes increasingly attracted to the prince, despite her recognition of Kaoru's more legitimate claim—he has by this time acknowledged her as his concubine, whereas Niou's intentions are less clear and, given his history, almost certain to be less honourable. Tormented by her inability to find a solution to this increasingly untenable love triangle, and with Niou sending word that he plans to come and steal her away in just a few days, the desperate young woman decides to throw herself into the river. She is rescued by a monk and a nun (siblings travelling together with their ailing mother), whom she joins in religious life at Ono, keeping her identity concealed from them and the occasional curious visitor, including the indefatigable Kaoru himself. Here the tale ends, in a strikingly inconclusive manner, with the throw-away comment (possibly inserted by a copyist) that "this appears to be the book," 本にはべめる, *hon ni habemeru* (6:381; T:1120; phrase omitted in S), following Kaoru's musings as to whether or not Ukifune is now under another man's protection.

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[34] For a discussion of Ôigimi's rationale and strategies for preferring death by anorexia to marriage with this relatively unobjectionable suitor, see Henitiuk, "Virgin Territory."

[35] A character in the Mumyôzôshi comments that "when Niou became Yûgiri's son-in-law, Nakanokimi's anxiety was very pitiful" (Marra 141). Despite her undeniably high birth, the failure of Nakanokimi's father to achieve political success and his subsequent withdrawal from the capital has rendered her status precarious. Furthermore, it remains a fact that, if abandoned by Niou, she would be subject to hitowarae (人笑え; literally, "the laughter of people," or social opprobrium, which all respectable Heian women fear to an enormous degree) as well as a decrease in her standard of living. Although Nakanokimi, as her father's sole surviving heir, will always have enough to assure comfort, Wakita Haruko reminds us that many "divorced or unmarried women in Heian society could be quite destitute" (Wakita 84).

This abbreviated plot summary, while it inescapably glosses over countless important characters and events, is intended to give some indication of the level of complexity to be found in the relationships depicted in the Genji monogatari. It also suggests that text's problematizing of the physical and emotional security presumably enjoyed by female characters in this elegant world where romance would appear to be everyone's raison d'être. Two very significant features of Heian culture, which Murasaki Shikibu highlights to her story's benefit, are first, that this is a polygynous society, and second, that aristocratic marriage is typically duolocal. In her acclaimed book entitled La Cour du Japon à l'époque de Heian aux X^{e} et XI^{e} siècles (1995), Francine Hérail describes contemporary marriage practices as follows:

> toutes les femmes n'avaient pas la chance d'être la seule épouse d'un homme. Il leur fallait quelquefois se contenter d'être une seconde épouse, ou même une concubine au statut plus précaire, la différence étant quelquefois assez mince. (Hérail 161)

Unless she were of much lower status, the wife would remain in her maternal home with her husband either moving in with her or calling more or less frequently, as would be the case if he has wives and concubines in other houses (the latter arrangement is termed 通い婚, *kayoi-kon*, or "commuting marriage"). Under this primarily uxorilocal or matrilocal system, female ownership of real estate and matrilineal inheritance are implicitly and explicitly recognized.[36] The importance of the fact that a woman's natal domicile is inherited from her mother and accordingly that such inheritance practices represent significant social and economic benefits to women cannot be underestimated. In contrast to the later development of virilocal marriage, which became entrenched with the establishment of the ie system (where households are headed by a man) in the 12th century, at this time "the position of women was comparatively high, whether the husband took up residence with the wife's family or simply visited the wife regularly" (Wakita 83).

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[36] William H. McCullough explains that "the feeling that a married woman should be the owner of her own residence appears to have been so strong among the Kyoto aristocracy that even in the case of a neolocal house provided by the husband, title to the house was sometimes transferred to the wife" (McCullough 118).

Nevertheless, the real empowerment such societal practices imply was not exactly unmitigated. Wakita Haruko, an eminent Japanese women's historian, writes, for example, that "aristocratic Heian women enjoyed relatively high status when uxorilocal marriage and female property inheritance were prevalent, but the society itself was patriarchal" (Wakita 79). Another critic, Peter Nickerson, usefully reminds us that "in spite of the importance of matrilineal kinship, female inheritance, and uxorilocal marriage, even if these institutions imply some kind of matriliny, they certainly do not constitute matriarchy" (Nickerson 439). Komashaku also challenges the opinion that Heian women had it better even than women in the newly liberated Meiji era (1868-1912) at the dawn of Japan's modern age (see Komashaku, Messēji, 202). While women did enjoy certain advantages under the "highly engendered conditions of power within the base structure of socio-political organization" (Buckley 91) of this rather unique patriarchal world, then, much remained resolutely controlled by and for masculine interests.

Understanding precisely what degree of security and autonomy was available to women within this complex social structure is a far from simple matter, but a great deal of modern analysis has critiqued the widespread view that Heian women were anything like equal participants in sexual relationships. Typical upper-class women of this period spend their lives immobile behind layered physical barriers, isolated from the public world. They are also excluded from certain branches of learning and from most official positions of power, and very much reliant on the goodwill of men. However, female ownership of property, as discussed above, problematizes any simplistic view of their oppression, as does the high degree of education actually accorded to these women (in Japanese letters, poetry, music, calligraphy, and so on). Our author plays on the contradictory notion of aristocratic women suffering from certain restrictions on their freedom of movement and self-expression and from the threat of violation, yet on another level enjoying surprising security of person and the opportunity for expression within their own highly comfortable domestic space. One of the central means she employs to do so is a focus on the gendered boundaries of their lives. While much has been made of the Heian woman "rooted like a flower in her house" (Brower and Miner 431) while men buzz around her like bees, she does not often seek to uproot herself and set out for greener pastures. Solutions to interpersonal crises are more commonly sought within firmly established barriers than without, given the dangers inherent to a masculine-dominant exterior world.

The Monogatari Genre

The literature of Japan's courtly age, known as ôchô bungaku (王朝文学), is defined as that produced during the several centuries (794-1186) when the capital city was located at Heian-kyô. Popular genres of the time include poetry and a range of prose, such as monogatari and the more personal nikki (日記; literally "daily record" and roughly equivalent to "diary" or "memoir"[37]). The former tend to be "about someone other than the author" (Miner, Odagiri, and Morrell 290) and indeed the Genji Monogatari readily lends itself to being read as Murasaki Shikibu's exploration of a wide variety of female fates outside her own necessarily limited existence. The term monogatari is literally the "telling" (語, *katari*) of "things" (物, *mono*), and refers specifically to "tales or prose narratives of various kinds, often including poems" (Miner, Odagiri, and Morrell 290). The Genji, considered the great masterpiece of not only ôchô bungaku but Japanese literature overall, comprises 54 prose parts or chapters about various individuals and their affective and political careers, and its complicated storyline is liberally embellished with some 800 verses.

Murasaki Shikibu's writing style is extremely sophisticated: lengthy, flowing sentences shift from first to third person, speech to thought, and few explicit grammatical markers are provided to guide the reader along. The subject of a given phrase is rarely expressed in any unambiguous fashion, as one is expected to understand much from the context (and, despite the painstaking effort required of modern readers, we assume that the author's contemporaries did indeed follow without undue difficulty, despite the fact that they were reading unpunctuated manuscripts). The reader is also expected to recognize countless poetic allusions, found throughout the prose passages as well as in the verses that are regularly exchanged between all manner of characters.

Since Arthur Waley's day, monogatari has tended to be translated into English as "tale," and it has also correctly been pointed out that monogatari and Western romances serve some of the same functions (see Miner, *Comparative Poetics*, 225). I do consider this Japanese genre to belong to the romance mode, loosely speaking, by which I mean a story that focuses on relations between men and women, often involving marriage or concubinage. Critics must, however, beware of what has been called "a tendency that can only be termed 'vicious', [that of judging] modern—and even premodern literary prose narrative written outside the west by culture-specific novelistic features construed normatively" (Miner, *Comparative Poetics*, 226). My objective here is nonetheless not to engage in an argument for or against the establishment of generic counterparts, and so for the purposes of my discussion, I will employ *monogatari* interchangeably with "tale," given that this is the term by which English readers know the text. Nevertheless, many elements are unique to the Classical Japanese genre, such as the range of narrative styles employed in this text, which have little in common with the Western preference (at least until the rise of postmodernism) for a non-porous authorial voice and static subjects clearly individuated from one another.[38]

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[37] Discussion of why these genres are not interchangeable can be found in Henitiuk, "Translating Woman: Reading the Female through the Male," or pages 1-4 of Sarra, Fictions of Femininity.

For example, the *Genji* makes use of *sakusha no kotoba* (作者の言葉, direct authorial intrusion) in contrast with *ji no bun* (地の分, description or ordinary third-person relation). Three other varieties of narration are found: namely, *sôshiji* (草子地) or comments made by the narrator in the persona of narrator; *kotoba* (言葉) or spoken dialogue; and shinnaigo (心内語) or a sort of broadened category of free indirect discourse. Portions written in this last style are, interestingly enough, especially noticeable in those chapters of the Genji where Ukifune makes her appearance. Earl Miner rightly explains that, reading shinnaigo, "it is often difficult to decide whether something is outer or inner speech, words or thought" (Miner, Comparative Poetics, 201), and so this narrative variety serves to emphasise the breakdown of other boundaries that, I argue, is a vital element of the tale's concluding Uji section. Readers are allowed more access to Ukifune's interior monologues than to those of other heroines in the Genji. We are unusually privy to the vacillation that distinguishes her crisis of choosing, with the result that even the barriers normally maintained between reader and character become dismantled as Murasaki Shikibu takes her story into its final stages.

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[38] For an in-depth analysis of cultural relativism and misplaced universalism, specifically in relation to Japan as of the Meiji period, see Yokota-Murakami, *Don Juan East and West: On the Problematics of Comparative Literature*, in which the Japanese-born critic rightly lambastes the widespread Eurocentric tendency to view Western genres as universal while dismissing Eastern genres as parochial. As Yokota-Murakami rhetorically asks, "If '*Shih ching* of the West' is an absurd frame in which to raise a question, why is 'a tragedy of China' usually considered not to be?" (Yokota-Murakami 172).

In his widely influential Genji Monogatari Taisei, published in 1953, Japanese scholar Ikeda Kikan describes the story as structurally tripartite. According to that analysis, parts 1-33 concern the glory and youth of the eponymous character, while 34-41 deal with his experience of conflict and death, and parts 45-54 the transcendence of death. (Ikeda's analysis excludes parts 42-44, likely owing to longstanding uncertainty as regards their authorship, but most subsequent critics have placed them within the third and final division.) Although it was admittedly not Ikeda's intention, his view of the Genji's structure can be also used to support my argument here that there is a general breaching of binaries and boundaries—in this case, those related to life and death—in the Uji chapters.

The *Genji* signals an enormous shift from early *monogatari*, which are presumed to have been written by men for the amusement of women and children. It is commonly understood that Murasaki Shikibu's contemporary readership consisted of both sexes and that, with her, women had arrived as important authors of *monogatari*. Similarly to the use of Latin in the European context, Chinese was the preferred mode of expression for the educated Heian male of her day, and thus composition in the *hiragana* syllabics of native Japanese had been relegated to women—it was actually termed *onna-de* (女手), or "woman's hand"—, who were not (or were not supposed to be) trained in the continental language.[39] As might be anticipated, the domination of women's writing had a significant impact on the development of vernacular fiction, resulting in "a phenomenon that still raises many intriguing questions about the relationship between language and audiences, and gender and literature" (Hockx and Smits xv). Many Westerners encountering Classical Japanese literature for the first time are indeed often astonished to learn that so many of the canonical works were written by women such as Murasaki Shikibu, Izumi Shikibu, and Sei Shônagon, employed de facto by their patrons as professional writers, and this some four or five centuries before the earliest named women writers appear in English (i.e., Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe in the 14th and 15th centuries). In *Figures of Resistance: Language, Poetry and Narrating in* The Tale of Genji *and Other Mid-Heian Texts*, Richard H. Okada rightly describes the *Genji* as being "created out of a distinct moment when women, empowered with a self-legitimating discourse marked for them (onna-de), found themselves gathered together in culturally stimulating socio-political groups" (Okada 181). Access to such legitimating discourse did indeed combine with other enabling factors to constitute strikingly positive conditions for female authorship.

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[39] As is only to be expected, many women violated this taboo. Murasaki Shikibu herself is known to have surreptitiously tutored her imperial mistress in the poetry of Chinese master Bai Juyi (a.k.a. Po Chû-i), for instance. A revealing incident related in the author's *Nikki* tells how, as a child, she eavesdropped on her brother's lessons and outshone him so noticeably that her father wished aloud that she had been born a boy (see Bowring 57-58).

The distinction drawn by renowned Japanese scholar Akiyama Ken between josei bungaku (女性文学, "women's writing") and dansei bungaku (男性文学, "men's writing") rests on the conviction that, by virtue of her sex, a writer such as Murasaki Shikibu exists in a tense and painfully symbiotic relationship with the world of monogatari (Akiyama 71-88). He argues that such symbiosis is not present between the (supposedly male) author of the late 10th-century Utsubo Monogatari and its less intense world, for example. In that story, a princess is pursued by more than a dozen rivals, eventually marrying the heir apparent, and sees her son named heir in his turn. (There is a more or less separate or parallel storyline involving magic zithers.) The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature explains that, in the earlier tale, "the characters lack flesh and blood, the descriptions do not arrest attention ..., the talk ... tends to be wooden, and the style is plain to the point of being humdrum" (Miner, Odagiri, and Morrell 254-55). The contrast with the Genji in terms of credibility and the generating of readerly interest could not be more pronounced, and perhaps this really is due to a creative woman's greater investment of herself in exploring avenues in fiction that she is barred from exploring in life.

In Unsex'd Revolutionaries, Eleanor Ty discusses the fiction produced by such iconoclastic English writers as Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Charlotte Smith during the last decade of the 1700s. Ty comments that "[w]hat is most interesting about these authors to a twentieth-century reader is the way they manipulated and changed the function and scope of the domestic novel in the process of challenging the patriarchal order" (Ty, Revolutionaries, xi). Likewise, what is interesting about the Genji to this twenty-first-century reader is precisely how Murasaki Shikibu manipulates and changes the function and scope of the traditional literary genre of monogatari. She delves profoundly and sympathetically into the lives of women, in the process of challenging patriarchal oppression and what Michitsuna no Haha, a near contemporary, has famously dismissed as the soragoto—そらごと, "empty words" or "lies" (Kawaguchi 109)—of earlier stories with their superficial treatment of relationships and unfailingly happy endings.

No Place in this World

The closing chapters of the Genji Monogatari are known collectively as the Uji jûjô (宇治十条; literally the "ten Uji chapters," although the preceding three are often grouped with them, as mentioned above), because much of the action shifts to this location south of Heian-kyô. With few exceptions (i.e., the earlier Yûgao and Akashi episodes), the final chapters constitute virtually the only time that the text breaches the limits of the city populated with its courtly elite. The rather inconveniently situated Uji, at a distance from the political and cultural centre and yet not quite part of the rural provinces, is clearly an example of Victor Turner's "no-man's-land betwixt-and-between" (Turner, "Universals of Performance," 11). This section of the text represents a concentration of oppositions in its concern with the juxtaposition of city and countryside, royal and commoner, religious and secular, living and dead.

As Terry Kawashima points out in Writing Margins: The Textual Construction of Gender in Heian and Kamakura Japan, for centuries before the Genji was written the historical Uji "had an association with the loss of power by a figure who withdrew himself from or was defeated in an imperial struggle" (Kawashima 225). The reference is to a son of Emperor Ôjin (fl. turn of the 5th century) who, having had the succession usurped by his brother, retired to this place on the outskirts. Its resonance was thus already one of a deliberate withdrawal from power politics by someone who sees no chance of winning the battle. It is, however, Murasaki Shikibu who, referencing a poem from an early Heian collection titled the Kokinshû,[40] definitively popularizes its affective association with the notion of a desolate, isolated place far from the lively centre, punning on the adjective ushi (憂し), meaning melancholy, gloomy, or miserable. Such negative connotations are nonetheless turned inside out in these chapters, in that Uji actually functions for Ukifune as a sort of "fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, … a striving after new forms and structure" (Turner, "Universals of Performance," 12). In other words, it offers the ideal heterotopic setting for what Turner's later work discusses as liminoid anti-structurality—a resistant, socially subversive condition.

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[40] The Kokinshû or Kokinwakashû, 古今(和歌)集, is the first of 21 poetic anthologies commissioned by the imperial court. Compiled ca. 900 by Ki no Tsurayuki, renowned poet, critic and author of the gender-bending Tosa Nikki, it contains 1111 poems by such luminaries as Ariwara Narihira, Ono no Komachi, Lady Ise, and Henjô. Poem 983, by Kisen Hôshi, as translated by Tyler, reads: "My hut is southeast of the city: I live with the deer in the Uji hills, where they say, I reject the world" (Tyler 849). The Kokinshû has been called "a code book for Heian aristocrats" (Arntzen 38).

Uji is also connected in history and legend with the Uji bridge, an image that Murasaki Shikibu exploits to full effect with regard to Ôigimi: the first chapter in which that character appears (and which, needless to say, narratologically links the chapters set here and those that come before) is called Hashihime (橋姫, translated as "The Maiden of the Bridge" in Tyler and "The Lady at the Bridge" in Seidensticker). The trope of this folklore figure, strongly associated with Uji, is that of a woman pining for her absent and faithless lover. Jealousy leads the abandoned Hashihime to transform after death into a sex-shifting demon that attacks travellers attempting to cross the bridge. Kawashima intriguingly points out that the Genji is "the only text written by a woman in the mid-Heian to early Kamakura periods that contains significant references to Hashihime" (Kawashima 251), and argues that Murasaki intentionally subverts the traditional reading of this bridge deity as a pathetic victim, drawing instead on its "potential for gendered resistance by an author whose social class practiced polygyny" (Kawashima 249).

Bridges are quintessentially liminal images, and this one serves to indicate transitions both physical and metaphorical. The psychic linking of our heroine with Ôigimi via that bridge is a clear warning that yet again all does not bode well for relations between the sexes. The self-destructive form of resistance practiced by the anorexic half-sister—she starved rather than enter into wedlock—subtly but powerfully informs Ukifune's subsequent story. While Ôigimi is associated exclusively with the bridge, Ukifune is more commonly linked to the Uji river in which she attempts to drown herself, but both bridge and river are closely related transitional spaces. In the isolated villa, ears filled with the roar of the waters outside, both heroines recognize the infelicitous nature of the rite of passage that would have them bound to a man and thus avoid it at all costs. As Doris Bargen comments in A Woman's Weapon: Spirit Possession in The Tale of Genji, in reference to the poetry exchange found in Abe 6:137 (T:1023-24; S:989-90), "Kaoru uses the Uji Bridge as a symbol of his firm commitment while Ukifune warns of its gaps and imminent decay" (Bargen 219-20): the necessarily more realistic woman is made uneasy by the passageway's dilapidated state. In contrast to the oblivious Kaoru, Ukifune clearly ranks among those Genji females whom Komashaku has termed リアルな目をもつ女, *riaruna me o motsu onna*, "women who have their eyes wide open" (Komashaku, Messêji, 160). Two chapters earlier, Kaoru, who has travelled from the city to check on the progress of renovations to the late Eighth Prince's villa that he had ordered after Ôigimi's death, first spies Ukifune as she crosses the Uji Bridge on her return from a pilgrimage, a "moment … of liminal significance" (Bargen 210). His dismissive first impression of the countrified carriage and its outrunners shifts to libidinous interest when he discovers who she is, and he promptly positions himself to peer at her (5:475; T:968; S:931). Interestingly, the heroine's very first words indicate awareness of her essential vulnerability in transit and otherwise: あやしくあらはなる心地こそすれ, *Ayashiku arawanaru kokochi koso sure*, "But I feel I'm quite exposed" (5:476; T:969; S:932).

Ukifune is not, of course, the sole liminal figure we encounter in this place. Uji acts for several characters as a site of seclusion where they prepare for transition to new states of existence. Ôigimi and Nakanokimi had celebrated the classically liminal rites of the latter's progress from virgin to wife in the villa, and shortly thereafter Ôigimi had passed from life to death. Kaoru, whom countless critics have characterized as a fundamentally vacillating figure (one reason why he is deemed an anti-hero, unlike the always solidly present Genji), had visited his spiritual tutor at Uji, waffling over the idea of taking Buddhist orders before finally, despite his protestations, becoming firmly ensconced in the secular world. The Eighth Prince, described as 俗聖とか, *zokuhijiri to ka*, "some sort of lay/holy man" (5:120; T:833; S:780), had himself been located uneasily between the sacred and the secular.

Nonetheless, Ukifune experiences a unique form of liminality that serves as the culmination of the female/boundary pairing on which Murasaki Shikibu plays insistently and effectively throughout the Genji. Edith Sarra, in her Fictions of Femininity: Literary Inventions of Gender in Japanese Court Women's Memoirs, specifies one aspect of this character's liminal status when she describes Ukifune as "a figure that deconstructs the polarization of secular and sacred in monogatari discourse, [one who] becomes a creature of the crossroads, positioned between the spiritual and the secular and at rest in neither" (Sarra 158). Not only religiously, but also existentially speaking, Ukifune is nowhere at rest because the factors determining the course of her life all seem beyond her control. (In contrast, where Kaoru is frustratingly indecisive, the decisions affecting his life remain within his grasp—he possesses the wealth, status, and agency to act whenever he chooses to do so.) Kaoru plans to hide Ukifune at Uji until he is ready to integrate her socially as a member of his household in the capital. But by sleeping with his rival Niou and then fleeing them both, she rejects the incorporation into (patriarchal) society that Kaoru offers her and relocates to a new site of self-imposed, self-protective seclusion at Ono.

Ukifune opts to remain in liminoid anti-structurality, the subversive state by which she overturns oppressive binaries. Refusing to serve as concubine to either man and refusing (despite herself) to die (the only two fates, utopic or dystopic, open to Ôigimi and so many other women within the romance), she rejects a colonized female sexuality and instead lays claim to an autonomous state ostensibly denied her under the patriarchal system.

Acknowledging this heroine's vital role in the final chapters, Edward Seidensticker writes that

> [t]o have created an anti-hero is of course a major accomplishment, but Kaoru's penchant for ruining others does not make him a particularly tragic figure. A pretty and pathetic girl always a victim and always on the outskirts of society offers richer possibilities. (Seidensticker, "Rough Business," 13)

In fact, however, Ukifune declines the role of helpless victim relegated to the shadows, by fully occupying the line distinguishing centre from margin, power from weakness. Turner has described the liminal phase as "being dominantly in the 'subjunctive mood' of culture, the mood of maybe, might-be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire" (Turner, "Universals of Performance," 11). These chapters of the Genji, which critics have noted "constitute the author's ironic masterpiece" (Miner, Odagiri, and Morrell 206), indisputably play out a fantasy involving a defiantly feminine-marked strategy of resistance. Murasaki Shikibu undercuts the very foundations on which her society is built, exposing the patriarchy's elegant forms of courtship as thinly disguised exploitation and gendered oppression by showing how they act to trap and victimize women.

The text explicitly (6:288; T:1084-85; S:1051) and implicitly demands that Ukifune be taken as a rereading of the iconic Kaguyahime, heroine of the Taketori Monogatari (竹取物語, The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter), who is sent to earth to bless a childless couple, but finally retreats to the moon rather than marry any of her suitors.[41] Of course, Ukifune is no celestial maiden and thus does not have recourse to such a supernaturally ideal form of evasion and self-determination. Although Kaguyahime has been correctly identified as "a figure[…] of discursive resistance" (Okada 171), that otherworldly character's resisting is unconnected to the realities inhabited by her readership and thus may to a certain degree suggest that her author did not have a personal stake in seriously addressing the limited range of choice females enjoy.

Japanese critic Imai Gen'e claims that the fact that Kaguyahime is able to reject five wealthy, powerful, and quite insistent suitors, and even the Emperor himself, without any hint of possible retaliation suggests that that earlier tale may have been male-authored. In a 1990 article, he argues that female-authored monogatari begins with rape, insofar as a woman writer may well have less confidence in the power of refusal without consequences and therefore a greater interest in exploring what is, sadly, an altogether more likely result. The difference of authorial gender is evidenced in the "exploitation of this narrative situation to convey, in many cases, a 'female' perspective" (Catty 228) about acts of gendered violence. Imai's provocative suggestion is that the rise of women authors and a broad female readership in the late Heian period (11th and 12th century) is fundamentally linked to a shift in the content and thrust of the classical narrative form. Within his country's tradition of letters, he argues, something called "women's writing" (specifically of the monogatari) comes into existence with the literary representation of rape—in other words, with an examination of the physically and emotionally damaging consequences of female victimization by males. The seizing of the representation of rape by women writers can be used to counter the objectification of women, a weapon of patriarchy, where their narratives stage the imagery of sexual violence as a reflection of power dynamics, bringing our focus to bear on the lived experiences or fears of women. The writing of violence is never explicit in the Genji, but where sexual relations are, for example, between a 40-year-old male and an unusually childlike 13-year-old girl (as is the case with Genji and Onna San no Miya), there is surely no need to point out the power discrepancy. Ukifune's story, while not overtly dealing with sexual assault, does demonstrate how cognizant Murasaki Shikibu is of the difficulties and very real dangers of non-compliance with the carnal demands made by men.[42]

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[41] The Genji itself calls the anonymous Taketori, written sometime between the late-9th and the mid-tenth century, "the forerunner of all tales" (2:370; T:325; S:311). The fairytale plot is simple: an elderly man out harvesting bamboo comes upon a female infant hidden inside one of the stalks, and takes her home to his wife. This couple raises the beautiful Kaguyahime ("Radiant Maiden") to adulthood, which occurs magically over the space of three months. She is then wooed by several men, including the emperor himself, but sets them impossible tasks to try to win her and, eventually, to avoid marrying anyone, returns to her heavenly home. (It is said that the smoke that once billowed from the now extinct Mount Fuji volcano was the result of the devastated emperor burning his mementoes of Kaguyahime.)

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[42] As Field usefully points out: "Conspicuous in Ukifune's poems is the word *mi*, meaning "self," being," or simply "I," but always with a strong sense of the corporeal, which in turn comes to imply a social reality that is inescapable precisely because it is material" (Field, Splendor, 289). The irony here is that many of these poems are written around the time that she denies her physical self by taking Buddhist orders. Field goes on to explain that the term occurs in eight of the 22 poems that Ukifune writes, whereas throughout all of Genji's 221 poems, for example, it appears only nine times.

Despite its embrace of a subjunctive liminality, Ukifune's fate is vastly more realistic than that of her fairytale counterpart: to escape the world that views her as nothing more than a sexual pawn, she flees (farther) into the countryside, into celibate life, into a denial of her imposed identity and painfully restricted options. Disowned by her father through no fault of her own and with no possible appeal; rejected by a social-climbing Lieutenant, who throws her over at the very last minute for a maternal half-sister he decides is more likely to further his political advancement; and relentlessly beset by two suitors of significantly higher status, Ukifune is fated to be a powerless object in masculine agonistic relations. As an individual, she disappears between these men as they ostensibly fight over who will or will not possess her. She is taken as a concubine by Kaoru, who opts not to marry her because her social status is not such as to oblige him to do so, and pursued passionately as a temporary plaything by her paternal half-sister's husband (who has a history of quickly tiring of women of Ukifune's class).[43] All of these developments lead the reader to contemplate to what degree male interest in the female is sparked primarily by mere rivalry and a desire for social advancement rather than any true interest in her per se.

Ukifune is an exception to the uxorilocal rule: she never enjoys the privilege of a space of her own. While it is only to be expected that women of the highest rank, such as Aoi or Lady Rokujô should reside in homes of their own (which they do), even Murasaki no Ue and Akashi no Kimi, who are of a similar class to Ukifune, manage for the most part to maintain control of their domestic space. Ukifune, by

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The ratio is then over 36% in Ukifune's poems vs. around 4% in the eponymous character's, which makes for a striking concentration in these final chapters on the problematic female body and self.

[43] Niou is said to have sent "two or three" into service with his sister, the First Princess, following such affairs (6:167; S:1002; T:1036).

contrast, is severely disadvantaged by being constantly relocated (often against her will) from here to there, experiencing multiple removals and accorded only a humiliating type of occupation of space (in lower-status homes or those belonging to others, where her own status is furtive and unacknowledged). It could be argued that Murasaki (Genji's "ideal" wife) is likewise denied spatial autonomy, in that hers is a virilocal marriage, but that character is granted kita no kata status[44] in Genji's Nijô mansion and, at least until the installation of the Third Princess, at Rokujô as well. Her physical place is not irredeemably subject to others' whims or otherwise downgraded, as is Ukifune's. We see in the story of Akashi someone who, like Ukifune, is "made vulnerable to often cruel and humiliating reminders of the humbleness of her station (mi no hodo)" (Okada 266). That woman is also fully aware of the danger of finding herself suffocatingly close to a man like Genji, but her resistance to marginalization takes the form of gentle self-assertion as, by determining to remain outside the capital city, despite his stated preference for moving her to a more convenient location, she manages to establish herself as centre and force him to come to her. The fact that Ukifune never enjoys a room she can truly call her own, and is instead repeatedly abducted and hidden away in the homes of others, operates fundamentally to call into question the gendered socio-cultural practices of Heian Japan.

It should also be borne in mind that Ukifune owns no property to enable her to support herself—apart from whatever pittance her mother might be able to provide, and of course she has the future of several other daughters to consider as well.

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[44] The principal wife was normally lodged in the north wing of a residence (directly behind the more public main hall) and thus a woman with precedence over other wives was referred to as the "person" (方, *kata*) of the "north" (北, *kita*).

Therefore, she does not enjoy the security from want that William McCullough, in his seminal article entitled "Marriage Institutions in the Heian Period," argues should belong to a woman of her class: "The independently owned property of a woman provided her and her children with a certain degree of security against the loss of her husband and compensated to some extent for the looseness observed in many Heian marriage ties" (McCullough 124). As Turner reminds us about liminars, or transitional entities, an important "structurally negative characteristic is that they have nothing. … Their condition is indeed the very prototype of sacred poverty" (Turner, Forest of Symbols, 98-99). When she leaps into the river, Ukifune abandons whatever property (e.g., furnishings, clothing, or letters) she may actually have possessed.

Although Ukifune is typically associated in readers' minds with Uji, her background—raised in the distant provinces—is actually even more peripheral than that. And while her career as an adult sees her move from the geographically marginalized East toward the centre, this development serves only to underscore her social marginality, which fact is magnified as she is gradually displaced again to ever more marginal (and thus ever more humiliating) spaces. In The Splendor of Longing in the Tale of Genji, Norma Field helpfully contrasts her with another female wanderer: "Ukifune is more than any other character heir to Tamakazura's 'wandering' [but] where Tamakazura's … carried her inexorably to the capital, Ukifune's takes her away from it" (Field, Splendor, 272). Ukifune's fundamental homelessness functions as both the cause and effect of her predicament, but it is a purported disadvantage that she ultimately embraces in a highly innovative move. Ukifune's life represents an eternal female quest for security, stability, and protection in a world where she must rely on the kindness of strangers, and what begins as a passively accepted trajectory is in the end co-opted for her own purposes. Left hanging in more ways than one, Ukifune chooses to become dis-owned, answerable to none but herself.

It is important to underscore that Ukifune (like the heroines to be discussed in the later chapters of this dissertation) comes to the reader's attention and begins her role within the tale on the cusp of adulthood. The limen has been employed extensively in anthropological literature as by definition bound up with the rites of passage attending puberty. When the family arrives in Heian-kyô, Ukifune has already reached marriageable age.[45] As a sexually available female of around 19 or 20 years of age, she can no longer be blithely ignored. The paterfamilias or other representative of patriarchal privilege must own her or at least acknowledge her existence and accept responsibility for authoring her future so that she can advance from the preliminal state of separation (as unattached girl) to the postliminal stage of incorporation into adult society (through being sexually linked to a man). Her biological father is deceased and her stepfather is too preoccupied with arrangements for his own daughters to pay any attention to Ukifune, but the fatherless heroine encounters a series of would-be lovers each more than willing to decide her future to their own liking.

In a daring act of resistance, this young woman remains stubbornly stalled on what anthropologist van Gennep characterized as the marge, which Turner has shown can become synchronic and spatial, rather than merely diachronic and temporal.

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[45] Moving back to the capital at a certain time is in fact quite a common strategy for the families of provincial governors, including Murasaki Shikibu's own: daughters are brought back from the geographical margin to be placed securely within the masculine centre via marriage.

Experiences have painfully acquainted her with all the disadvantages her lack of paternal support and rustic upbringing entails for anyone hoping to make her way within the rigid social hierarchies that obtain in the capital.[46] She gets shuffled about, first even within the step-father's home, where she is evicted from her own rooms to make way for the new son-in-law, her erstwhile suitor. She is next installed in an out-of-the-way corner of Nakanokimi's rooms in the western wing of Niou's Nijô mansion, then sent to a small house on the edge of the city, and finally taken to Uji, where she is expected patiently to await a final relocation to Kaoru's Sanjô mansion. Unbeknownst to him, however, she is carried off by Niou for a tryst in a residence on the opposite bank before being surreptitiously returned and again told to wait. Ukifune's increasingly unstable marginalization is clearly tied to her sexuality. Murasaki Shikibu and my other authors are fully aware that the marginal cannot operate to counter the iron grip on power held by the masculine-privileging, exploitive centre; instead they have their heroines fundamentally reject such binaries and relocate to the boundary itself, employing their own disempowerment as a somehow empowering strategy.

In poetry exchanges with Niou, Ukifune characterizes herself as このうき舟ぞゆくへ知られぬ, *kono ukifune zo / yukue shirarenu*, "this drifting boat bound who knows where" (6:142; T:1026; S:991) and a few pages later compares herself to a snowflake that dissolves into nothingness before ever reaching its destination: 中空にてぞわれは消ぬべき, *nakazora nitezo ware wa kenubeki*, "I must melt away in mid-air" (6:146; T:1027; S:993). As Bargen has pointed out, "[b]oth images signal her social marginality and existential liminality" (Bargen 220), as well as an utter lack of agency. Subsequent to her seduction by the prince, Ukifune seeks the ultimate postliminal state by throwing herself into the Uji River, in a bid to cross that final boundary between life and death, but does not succeed. She remains among the living even though, to her friends and family, she is effectively lost. The superstitious villagers who find her half-drowned and half-conscious body under a tree fear that she may be a magical spirit such as a fox. This episode supports Turner's contention that liminars are often classed with ghosts or animals, "dead to the social world, but alive to the asocial world" (Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, 27).

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[46] It should be borne in mind that the official area of the walled capital city was really quite small, "about 3.5 miles (4.5 km) north to south and 2.5 miles (5.2 km) east to west" (Coats 52), and this intimate scale had real and immediate implications for the different ranks of aristocracy all jostling for favour and position.

Ukifune explicitly announces her unanchored existence: this "drifting" (浮, *uki*) "boat" (舟, *fune*) can find no place of belonging within the social (= androcentric) world. Significant here is the practice of identifying the female characters in the Genji via allusion to a poem composed by or about them, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Her "name" is derived from a poem that she authors, recited in answer to one by Niou as he conveys her across the river, signalling her self-knowledge and full awareness of her plight.[47] Although readers over the past many centuries have called her Ukifune for the sake of convenience, this woman does not therefore possess anything like a name in the Western sense. When the narrator deems it necessary to refer to her heroine in a specific way (this occurs but rarely, in any event, given the context-governed grammar of Classical Japanese), the identifier used is a generic onna (女, "the woman/lady").

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[47] It is noteworthy that the term ukifune appears only twice in the Genji, once in this poem by the character assigned that sobriquet and once in an earlier poem by Akashi no Kimi (2:456; T:361; S:347).

One could argue that the lack of name is merely a Heian Japanese social convention, and thus that this element should not unduly disconcert reader or critic. However, Earl Miner's article titled "The Heroine: Identity, Recurrence, Destiny" (1982) astutely teases out that the effect in Ukifune's case in particular is indeed disconcerting, effectively problematizing her status as subject. Readers who do not bear in mind the provisional nature of women's appellations risk neglecting an essential feature of Murasaki Shikibu's characterization technique:

> The effect, which no translations could adequately represent, is to make a character such as Ukifune less an agent clearly apart in the world, less an individual distinguished from others in the story, than a human entity much more continuous with other characters, more defined by relation to them…. (Miner, "Heroine," 63)

The male characters also lack personal names, as already explained above with regard to the character commonly referred to as Genji. Nevertheless, their court title identifiers explicitly mark men as full members of the socio-political centre, the system of authority that feels entitled to marginalize women like Ukifune. Niou, for example, is called His Highness of War (兵部卿の宮; Hyôbukyô no Miya), while Kaoru is promoted from Councellor (中納言; Chûnagon) to Commander (大将; Taishô) during these chapters. Ukifune's far more amorphous sobriquet, by contrast, underscores how she is cut off from any source of power, not allowed to possess a subject position of her own. Miner continues: "Such relativism of subject and object implies a human identity that is essentially continuous with—or at least relative to—other identities" (Miner, "Heroine," 64).[48] Rachel Brownstein's Becoming a Heroine: Reading about Women in Novels contains the insightful comment that, "conceiving of herself as the creature of her relationships with others, and bound by her woman's fate to a life of relationships, the conscious heroine longs for solitude and separateness" (Brownstein 288-89), which certainly applies to Ukifune. While it is true that the absence of (female) naming is a fact of Heian Japanese history and not merely a literary effect, Murasaki Shikibu employs this gendered and highly significant feature with stunning results.

Furthermore, Kaoru arrogantly claims the right to designate Ukifune as a katami (形見, "memento/keepsake") or hitogata (人形, "effigy")— his fetishistic doll. The eventual arrival of Ukifune is foreshadowed by his comment (in Tyler's translation): "how I could love someone whose looks recalled hers a little, even if she was unworthy in rank!" (T:932; 5:372; S:890). If he had his way, Kaoru would hide this woman within a memory of Ôigimi, as a stand-in for the deceased half-sister whom she strongly resembles. It is in fact this resemblance that has prompted Nakanokimi to pawn her off on Kaoru in the first place. He desires a construct to replace the lost Ôigimi (or his own image of who Ôigimi was, which is clearly not the same thing), and because Ukifune is not an autonomous subject in his mind, he sees no problem with assigning her the identity that he wants filled. But the displacement does not stop there: to Kaoru, Ôigimi herself substitutes for the Eighth Prince, who substitutes for Kashiwagi, the real father he never knew. Ukifune is in fact at four removes from the person Kaoru has been seeking and therefore, where he is concerned, exponentially distanced from subjecthood.

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[48] Ukifune employs the first-person pronoun marô, which Field describes as having a "poignant, intimate ring" (Field, Splendor, note 60, p. 344) , and my dictionary says is used to suggest contact with another, thus creating a subject that is less self-reliant. Field also points out that this pronoun appears on no more than 37 occasions throughout the very lengthy Genji.

Ukifune has not suddenly lost her moorings by being caught between two attractive men, but is instead a drifting entity that, arousing longing for someone who is no more or serving merely as a passing amusement, has never been allowed to exist in her own right. If Ukifune can name herself, establish herself as a subject, that would undermine and subvert these exploitive plans. Sarra is correct to write that Kaoru's "repeated journeys, made necessary by the heroine's various displacements, take on the aura of an existential quest that tests the psychic as well as the spatial boundaries of the Heian court" (Sarra 188). Nonetheless, I believe that if readers pay appropriate heed to Ukifune's own existential wandering, they will see how she is able to shape the bounds of her life by creating the space within which the rest of her life will be played out. The tremendous difficulty of (re-)creating oneself as a subject, as the centre in one's world, when one is doomed always to be treated as a marginal figure located in someone else's shadow, cannot be overstated. After their first night together, Niou presses Ukifune to tell him who she is (6:122; T:1018; S:982). He already has a pretty good idea, but, in what constitutes the first deliberate instance of keeping her self to herself, she refuses to comply (albeit in a charming manner calculated not to offend the powers that be). This defensive action operates as a recognition that, if she is to survive, others must somehow be denied the right to define and control her.

The Secret of Ukifune

Before proactively hiding herself in religious life at Ono (north of Heian-kyô), Ukifune is trapped into merely reacting to a repeated pattern of concealment and exposure, manipulated by others back and forth across a fundamentally unstable threshold between seen and unseen, identified and unidentified, acknowledged and unacknowledged. In embracing the limen as her place, however, she manages to turn the negative term of each of these binaries to her advantage. Inou Yôko, in a fascinating article on the multiple tales of hiding and being hidden that constitute what can be termed the "Ukifune monogatari,"[49] suggests that we take the entire career of this heroine as exemplary of a variant, virtually mise-en-abyme form of the kaimami motif.

Kaimami (垣間見, literally "peering through a gap in a hedge") is the omnipresent peeping-tom motif and "the standard heroic approach to love" (Field 123) in Heian literature. This scopic exploitation is paradigmatically employed in the first episode of the Ise Monogatari (伊勢物語, Tales of Ise; compiled in the late 9th and early 10th century) as the starting point for fictional adventures based on the life of renowned 9th-century poet and lover Ariwara Narihira.[50] That hero, having spied on two sisters living in the ruined former capital of Nara, sends them a love poem written on a strip of fabric torn from his own garment. The stories that follow examine a broad array of male/female relationships, and as has been explained elsewhere, "[t]here is a sense in which Murasaki Shikibu writes large the Ise

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[49] The final thirteen parts of the Genji have traditionally been referred to as the "Kaoru monogatari," and within his tale we find hers.

[50] Ariwara is commonly taken to be a possible model for the character of Genji.

Monogatari in her Genji Monogatari" (Miner, Odagiri, and Morrell 169). A related concept is kunimi (国見, "viewing the land"), another trope of possession via the gaze, whereby a man stands on a hilltop and surveys his domain.[51]

Like kunimi, kaimami is highly gendered, in that gazers are by definition male (the exceptions—women peering through their blinds at the all too unreliable gentlemen callers—simply prove the rule about which sex has the freedom to seek out a promising gap through which to observe the world). Famous examples include Genji's first sighting of the innocent and oblivious Murasaki; Yûgiri catching a titillating glimpse of his stepmother; and Kashiwagi stunned by the careless self-exposure of the Third Princess, which leads to both their downfalls. Field has famously termed this motif "visual rape," because there is a strong sense of inherent violation for women who were supposed to remain concealed behind walls, curtains, and screens. Female space seems unavoidably pregnable in such scenes. Hérail describes the situation of court women, who one might think would, given their residence in the imperial place, enjoy greater security than do ie no onna (家の女, "house women," i.e., those not serving at court), as follows:

> il n'existaient pas de fermetures solides ; écrans, volets coulissants, stores ne permettaient pas de s'isoler. C'était pour certaines dames en service au palais un des aspects déplaisants de leur vie que de ne pas pouvoir éviter quelquefois une intrusion indésirable. En outre, rien

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[51] A famous example is by Emperor Jomei in the Manyôshû (万葉集, read as either "Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves" or "Collection for Ten Thousand Generations"), the oldest extant anthology of Japanese poetry, compiled probably in the late Nara period (712-793). In Steven D. Carter's translation, the poem reads: "Many are the hills, / the mountains of Yamato, / yet when I ascend / heavenly Kaguyama, / the peerless mountain, / when I look down on the land: / where the land stretches, / hearth smoke rises everywhere; / where the water stretches, / water birds fly everywhere. / Ah, a splendid country, / this land Yamato / of bounteous harvests!" (Carter 21).

> n'arrêtait les voleurs, ils sévissaient même au palais, notamment la nuit. (Hérail 108)

In any event, exposure to male eyes means appropriation of the female body and self, marking the beginning of an amorous affair: it generally holds true that, by allowing herself to be seen, a woman tacitly accepts the voyeur as her lover. Therefore, as Field reminds us, "[f]or a woman, to be invisible is to reserve a modicum of power" (Field, Splendor, 122).

In Ukifune's case alone, however, is the woman hidden and exposed, only to be hidden again, the endless iteration of culturally imposed female invisibility providing yet more evidence of her lack of stability or agency. This young woman actually functions as an object of failed secrecy through her entire life. The hiding takes many forms, involving inter alia: her physical person, her parentage, her identity, others' knowledge of her whereabouts, others' involvement with her, others' plans for her future, the secret of her abduction(s), the secret of her supposed death, and her final fate. Along the way, she also learns to keep specific aspects private: her plans, her actions, even her emotions, before achieving a more perfect and total self-concealment as an anonymous nun.

Ironically, each time she is hidden by another, Ukifune simultaneously becomes increasingly foregrounded, more present with each absence. Her denial by the Eighth Prince constitutes the first imposed hiding, but his actions only make the mother more than ever determined to create opportunities for their daughter—presumably so that she herself can vicariously be "made present" by being vindicated. Chûjô has long been hidden away like the Eighth Prince's dirty little secret. The shameful thing here is not his taking a lover, but rather the glaring contradiction between his image as a saintly cleric, devoted to the memory of his wife, and his behaviour. Shameful as well is his refusal to acknowledge his offspring and support her in some way, given that the mother is not completely to be despised, especially with her family connection to his late wife. These closing chapters have, clearly, a much darker, more pessimistic (realistic?) tone than the earlier ones, and the reader is encouraged to judge this man against Genji, who never forgets even the lowliest of women with whom he becomes involved and provides amply and chivalrously for them all.[52]

Ôigimi and Nakanokimi did not know their half-sister during childhood. The Eighth Prince's attitude had made the performance of absence by both Ukifune and her mother necessary, but with his own real absence in death, the mother can finally bring them both forward. Chûjô's main concern is to find a suitable husband for this beautiful but woefully unchampioned daughter. Unfortunately, in Ukifune's case, the action of making visible equals making more vulnerable, in that all of the relocations involved in bringing her to the marriage market merely serve to highlight her marginality and increase her victimization. The husband Chûjô decides upon and who she is initially convinced is a highly cultivated, sensitive man, rejects Ukifune without a second thought as soon as he discovers she is no blood relation to her wealthy stepfather. On almost the very eve of their planned wedding, he blithely transfers his affections to the next eldest daughter, in the (fully justified) belief that this bride will mean greater financial benefits from his father-in-law.

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[52] There exists a highly amusing telling by Marguerite Yourcenar of a "lost" chapter of the Genji. Entitled "Le Dernier Amour du prince Genghi," her story recounts the last days of the legendary lover, who is visited just before his passing by the one woman of whose existence he has no recollection.

Ukifune's mother now despairs of successfully guiding her along the treacherous path to marital bliss, owing to patriarchal treachery and its stranglehold on both their lives. Pained for her beloved daughter, who must give up the bridal chambers (furnished with all the wedding accessories originally prepared for her) and bear witness to the former fiancé's visiting of her sister instead, Chûjô asks Nakanokimi to take the young woman in for a little while. It is interesting that to make her daughter known, the mother had brought Ukifune out of the hinterlands (the province of Hitachi) and into the capital city, merely to find that she must hide her yet again if there is to be any chance of success.

Nakanokimi generously welcomes Ukifune, but takes careful steps to keep her hidden from her husband. However, no one possessing any degree of familiarity with monogatari conventions can be unaware of how risibly unsuccessful it always proves to try to hide an attractive woman from amorously inclined men such as Genji or Niou. Nakanokimi effectively, while not intentionally, exposes Ukifune to the notice of her (the former's) salacious spouse the instant she decides to conceal her. The very act of hiding a female away automatically piques masculine interest and brings her to his attention—concealment of female flesh and identity renders both attributes an obsessive fetish. The mother once more comes to the rescue and, seeking to place some distance between her daughter and the ever-dangerous male libido, deposits her at the azumaya (東屋, or "eastern cottage"), a non-descript, half-finished house she owns in Sanjô.[53] Naturally, residing alone so near Kaoru's home merely exacerbates the revelation of defenceless Ukifune, rendering her more available to his plotting and even Nakanokimi's. The latter, in an attempt to maintain her own tenuous distance from an increasingly libidinous, demanding Kaoru, in fact deliberately exposes Ukifune to him. He then abducts Ukifune and takes her to Uji, where he hopes to keep her presence a secret, but Niou's curiosity and competitive streak are always sparked by just such behaviour.

Ukifune's disruptive presence between the friends, predicated upon her inherently dangerous sexuality as an unattached female, must be disguised, neutralized as absence. However, all Kaoru's act of hiding her at Uji does is expose her in yet another stage of the endlessly repeated paradox where hiding equals greater vulnerability. He intends this as a temporary solution, planning very soon to install Ukifune in his main Sanjô residence, but the new hiding place (central not only geographically, but also in terms of the power hierarchy) is still under construction. In other words, it is itself in a liminal state, underscoring the fact that the patriarchy can literally find no appropriate place at its centre in which to put marginal Ukifune, not even merely as acknowledged mistress. Kaoru, as is his wont, dithers endlessly and allows a great deal of time to pass, while she sits bored and lonely at Uji. Niou again wastes no time in gaining access to the hidden prize, penetrating the pathetic defences of both house and woman, just as Kaoru had done at the "eastern cottage."

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[53] Azumaya, also the title of the chapter in which this episode appears, is a reference to a Nara-period folk song or saibara by that name. The lyrics tell of "a man [who] arrives at a woman's house in the pouring rain and demands to be admitted. The woman, inside, answers that the door is unlocked and urges him to come in" (T 1138).

Ukifune learns to be secretive, to keep her own council. We can usefully interpret her solitary time at Uji as spent in what Gaston Bachelard would call a space of preparation:

> L'être qui se cache, l'être qui « rentre dans sa coquille » prépare « une sortie ». Cela est vrai sur toute l'échelle des métaphores depuis la résurrection d'un être enseveli jusqu'à l'expression soudaine de l'homme longtemps taciturne. En restant encore au centre de l'image que nous étudions, il semble qu'en se conservant dans l'immobilité d'une coquille, l'être prépare des explosions temporelles de l'être, des tourbillons d'être. Les plus dynamiques évasions se font à partir de l'être comprimé…. (Bachelard 110)

After the apparent suicide, the servant Jijû comments to Niou: "She usually had extraordinarily little to say …. She was never one to express herself clearly, and it was rare for her to tell anyone else about things that affected her deeply" (Tyler 1056) (see also 6:217; S:1023). Jijû also reminds him that no one ever really knew what Ukifune was thinking: she had kept her thoughts and ideas private (sharing them with the reader, but not the other characters). All of the attendants assume that her wish was to become Niou's mistress, but she insists silently that she had not made that decision. It is possible that Ukifune means to hide, even from herself, her desire for Niou (and she clearly does desire him) not only because she has already implicitly accepted Kaoru, but because she knows that Niou is even less to be trusted than other men. Inside that shell to which she has withdrawn, bombarded by letters sent from the capital by both men, the immobile Ukifune develops an innovative scheme for escaping her predicament.

Significantly, Ukifune hides a portion of her literary production. Poetry is employed as one of the primary means of conducting courtship and maintaining relationships in Heian society. To perform its function, a poem must pass from one person to another, more often than not delivered by a third person. Ukifune rejects this social purpose for several of her compositions, and keeps them in her own possession: composed with care, but not communicated. Although she writes more poems than any other woman in the tale,[54] she neither initiates poetic exchanges nor allows all of her poems to reach their supposedly intended recipients —only 3 of 12 in the Tenarai chapter (手習, "(At) Writing Practice") do so. Instead, she replies and yet simultaneously, by opting not in fact to send what she writes, does not reply. It has been said that correspondence is among "the luxur[ies] … reserved for the well-born" (Peel 114), a form of indirect interpersonal communication where the highly mediated written word operates as an elegant substitute for direct, physical contact that could be clumsy or even dangerous. Ukifune, in her determinedly retiring role, renders the writing she produces even more elegantly indirect, by declining to share it at all. Again, we see her claiming a liminal position, here with regard to the communication process and mating rituals, both vital to Heian subject formation. As Bargen notes, "[a]lthough in the tentative manner of someone fearfully unsure of success, she has already begun to reconstitute the fragmented pieces of her self through literary creativity disguised as mere writing practice. Her art must, like her identity, be kept secret from the world" (Bargen 236). The world has denied her full subjectivity, and now that she is starting to craft her own (although it remains unknown by others), Ukifune opts to assert control by keeping it "her own"—denied to other's knowledge and their potential interference. In her discussion of Richardson's Clarissa, Brownstein usefully notes that "letters, like rooms and dresses, protect and present and enclose the self" (Brownstein 60), and how much more so if one's correspondents are never allowed even to read them.

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[54] Field explains that Ukifune "has twenty-six to Murasaki's twenty-three, the Akashi Lady's twenty-two, Tamakazura's twenty, Nakanokimi's nineteen, Ôigimi's thirteen, Fujitsubo's twelve, and the Rokujô Lady's eleven" (Field, Splendor, 286).

Unlike the more typically resourceful Akashi no Kimi or Tamakazura, for example, poor Ukifune has never learned how to accommodate herself to the ways of the world or deal effectively with men and their demands. Besieged on all sides, her only alternative is to try a novel strategy: to determine to hide herself, which (given the dearth of proper refuges) necessarily means attempting to withdraw permanently into a state of being and yet not being.[55] Murasaki Shikibu here picks up on the underdeveloped storyline of Yûgao, who does something similar in the first few chapters of this text when she disappears to avoid unpleasantness with Tô no Chûjô's jealous wife. With that character, however, the reader was not made privy to her thoughts or experiences (the episode is related to his friends by Tô no Chûjô, who wonders whatever happened to the always sweet and yielding Yûgao) and she dies too young ever to have a story of her own. It is her daughter, Tamakazura, who resurfaces years later and is taken in by Genji, ostensibly as his long-lost daughter (although he was with Yûgao when she died and is fully aware that the girl is his best friend's child), and finally marries in haste in order to avoid her lecherous "father's" advances.

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[55] As an ie no onna, Ukifune's power and security necessarily lies in remaining hidden from view and scandal. For a wonderful discussion of the power that can paradoxically be achieved by a court lady in proactively risking self-exposure, see the passage in Sei Shônagon's Pillow Book entitled "When I Make Myself Imagine" (Morris 39).

The *hahakigi* (帚木, "broom tree") image from the chapter of the same name in the *Genji* (the very chapter, incidentally, that offers the "Rainy Night Discussion" where we learn about Yûgao and all those other middle-ranked women) is also striking. Already married Utsusemi heroically resists the handsome Genji's arrogant attempts at seduction, painfully aware that she is of too low status to find happiness in a relationship with this man. In a poem, her frustrated pursuer likens her to that tree, which is commonly employed as a poetic metaphor for something that, while visible from a distance, disappears when one draws close. Utsusemi slips from Genji's clutches and he is left holding only a cloak, the superficial outer layer that his prey has shed. This scene functions to illustrate that almost the only way for a woman to find protection, to stymie the would-be predator, is by disappearing.

Ukifune takes on both subject and object roles where this final female disappearance is concerned. In "Le rire de la Méduse," Hélène Cixous has written:

> Si la femme a toujours fonctionné « dans » le discours de l'homme, signifiant toujours renvoyé à l'adverse signifiant qui en annihile l'énergie spécifique, en rabat ou étouffe les sons si différents, il est temps qu'elle disloque ce « dans », qu'elle l'explose, le retourne et s'en saisisse, qu'elle le fasse sien, le comprenant, le prenant dans sa bouche à elle, que de ses dents à elle elle lui morde la langue, qu'elle s'invente une langue pour lui rentrer dedans. Et avec quelle aisance, tu

> verras, elle peut depuis ce « dans » où elle était tapie somnolente, sourdre aux lèvres qu'elle va déborder de ses écumes. (Cixous 49)

Is this not precisely what Ukifune does? She dislocates and explodes the "within" space to which she is constrained by virtue of her sex and social rank (or lack thereof), seizing and making hers a separate, metaphorical space of her own creation where her story can be told.[56] The narrator ironically reminds us that the scene at the Uji villa on the morning after Ukifune's "suicide" was just like the aftermath of a young woman's kidnapping in an old tale and thus not worth describing—物語の姫君の人に盗まれたらむ朝のやうなれば、くはしくも言ひつづけず (6:191; T:1047; S:1012). The real point, of course, is that Ukifune has done something virtually unspeakable by in effect unilaterally abducting and hiding herself away.

Suspicious and single-minded Kaoru, however, asks: 御供に具して失せたる人やある, *Ontomo ni mashite ushisetaru hito ya aru*, "Didn't someone else go with her?" (6:221; T:1058; S:1024). He cannot bring himself to believe that his mistress would run away, that she would (or could) choose to make her own life apart from men.[57] Ukifune has been constantly and ostentatiously placed on one or another side of boundaries controlled by male power and created through male action or inaction. Her existential liminalization is due to a repeated hiding and being revealed (in various forms) replacing the more usual one-time exposure of that which has been both discreetly and discretely hidden. Throughout the story, the secret that others try to make of Ukifune is never successful (one might say that it is never consummated); it is always in the process of being constructed and reconstructed for a range of motives. Ukifune's life is lived in the present progressive tense of secreting—others seek to and do temporarily conceal her, and later she subversively seeks to and does indeed conceal herself both physically and psychologically.

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[56] Okada makes the following quite probable claim, which supports the argument being made here that Murasaki Shikibu's main interest is in providing a realistic look at women and how they might creatively deal with the dilemmas they encounter: "That women are well advised to cultivate an inner toughness undoubtedly derives from experiences in the imperial salons, and the unwillingness to rely excessively on predetermined forms becomes an important factor in their very survival" (Okada 244).

[57] In The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver bemoans a similar dilemma: "But I begin to think there can never come much happiness for me from loving; I have always had so much pain mingled with it. I wish I could make myself a world outside it, as men do" (Eliot 528).

In the Kagerô chapter (蜻蛉, translated as "The Mayfly" in Tyler and "The Drake Fly" in Seidensticker),[58] shortly after Ukifune's unexplained disappearance, Kaoru spies on his sister-in-law, the First Princess (in whom he has always maintained a rather prurient interest, as has Niou, her own younger brother), who is wearing a transparent shift owing to the summer heat. He immediately insists on having his wife (the Second Princess) also dress in the thinnest of clothing—going so far as to order a robe made up for her (6:241; T:1064; S:1032) and helping her put it on. Again, Kaoru is trying to make one woman a doll-like substitute for another, but such insistence on transparency and the exposure of the female body is clearly a response to the new opaqueness of Ukifune, her refusal to let either her body or her self be further exposed and exploited.

While Ukifune (like Guilliadun and Lady Matilda, as will be discussed in chapters two and three, respectively) does not face a literal death, she does experience a figurative one. Ukifune disappears, escaping the men who would metaphorically kill her by negating her presence and self. From that position of "non-being" in the eyes of society, our heroine is empowered to observe, accorded space to think, make decisions, and gain the strength and wherewithal to survive:

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[58] A kagerô is an insect that lives only a few hours, used poetically as "a symbol of the uncertain boundaries between the dream world of the unconscious and the tangible, verifiable world of reality" (Bargen 226). The term has also been translated as "gossamer," notably in Edward Seidensticker's rendering of Michitsuna no Haha's Kagerô Nikki as The Gossamer Years.

> Ukifune, not dying, cannot be buried in beautiful verse. She is frozen as a gaze, sublimely undistinguished and arresting. [...] Ukifune is, finally, the homeless one, the one with no place, not even death, to vanish to. Through her, the stepdaughter tale, mere static variant of the traveling hero, bursts through the asymmetric relationship into an undefined beyond. Ukifune undistinguished looms larger than Kaoru. (Field, Splendor, 296)

The last of the Genji heroines chooses an existential homelessness, an "undefined beyond" or solitary no-place between life and death, erasing her identity in order paradoxically to proclaim herself as subject.

Field argues that she undergoes "a parody of rebirth, coming perhaps as a disappointment to hopes that Ukifune might at last have escaped the scripts imposed on her by others. Even if the listening heroine has come to occupy the center of the tale's consciousness, she is hardly a unified, autonomous entity herself" (Field, Splendor, 278). True, but Ukifune has nonetheless carved out a personal space in that nunnery, with her shorn hair (a feature that strongly symbolizes a woman's sexual attractiveness to men) and refusal to conform to the demands of others. She is finally able to control the access that males have to her person, and that cannot but represent a very important form of new life and autonomy. Ukifune has been required to exist and not exist simultaneously, owing to the decisions of the patriarchal forces, decisions governed by their egos and jealousy, as well as their selfish belief that one woman is fundamentally the same as another—that women can be substituted, rejected, or hidden away with impunity. Bargen writes: "In terms of the uncanny, Ukifune is and is not Ukifune; she is Ukifune to the extent that she represents Ôigimi and the Eighth Prince. She is other" (Bargen 211). This heroine, refusing to be used as interchangeable with anyone else, insists that she be allowed to be and not be on her own terms.

Ukifune, who has been exiled since birth from the house of her father, is taken from something like the maternal house—a normative place of security for Heian women—to various inaugurations of patriarchally controlled space. Her lack of security is increasingly underscored along the way, right up until she arrives at the simultaneously feminine and not-feminine space that is the nunnery, which last move she initiates. Of course, even her final actions are somehow passively performed, because women are unable fully to function more as subject than object in her society. Sarra notes that

> [l]ike Hashihime, the mythical lady of the bridge at Uji with whom she is poetically associated, Ukifune ends as a woman whose movements come to an uncertain halt finally at Ono, in the hills west of Mount Hiei, poised between the insistent pressures of her ties to the world and a growing desire for a life of Buddhist renunciation. And it is from this position that she takes up her brush and begins to write. (Sarra 138)

At least this is a halt, a concealment of her choice, where she can enjoy breathing space and begin to express herself (even if only to herself) as an autonomous subject in an idiosyncratic, feminine version of a tagui naki monogatari (類なき物語, an "unprecedented tale") (3:205; T:462; S:438).[59]

Patriarchy and Paternal Denial

I have already established that despite certain elements (e.g., inheritance and property rights) suggesting partial matrilineality, Heian Japanese society remained fundamentally patriarchal. All of the adventures of Ukifune—who has been succinctly described as a young woman tossed away by various men[60]—are predicated upon an originary act of paternal denial that reveals the devastating gendered hierarchies of her society. This heroine has been denied her birthright, which fact, in the highly rank-conscious Heian world, places her at severe social and economic disadvantage. She is rendered materially and metaphorically homeless by the father's rejection and, as Sarra comments,

> [f]rom the moment she leaves the eastern provinces, Ukifune is doomed to a life of wandering. With her mother she journeys to the capital where she plays poor relation to her half-sister Nakanokimi, moves back and forth between the capital and Uji, makes pilgrimages to Hase, and is abducted by first one lover and then the other. (Sarra 141)

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[59] That phrase had been used by Genji during a scene with the utterly dependent and increasingly panicked Tamakazura, where he behaves more egregiously than usual but she fends him off with a sharp retort. While her dilemma is played partly as comic relief, the implications are serious.

[60] もともと浮舟はその生まれからして、男に捨てられた女の子であるから、彼女自身の存在がすなはち男の不実の証明なのである (Komashaku, Messêji, 193).

However, her unfixed, wandering life actually dates from birth, when she was exiled from the father's protection and the life that should have been hers, even with a mother belonging to a lesser class. Ukifune occupies the borderlines of rank and status, forced into a marginal social position owing to selfish rejection by the father and the culturally constructed weakness of the mother. This "distressed mother … grievously impotent concerning her [daughter's] fate" (Bargen 213) cannot confer legitimacy on or provide adequately for her child. The careers of several characters (e.g., Genji, Murasaki, and Tamakazura) demonstrate a correlation between the mother's disadvantageous status and their own difficulties succeeding in the world. While the formidable Fujiwara Michinaga (father to Shôshi, the empress whom Murasaki Shikibu served, and incidentally an admirer of the author's) is recorded as saying that "a man's career depends on his wife's family" (McCullough and McCullough 270) and that therefore he must treat her with respect and consideration, this holds true only where her family is not only well positioned, but also willing and able to recognize her. Ukifune's life story sends a dire warning about the problems that ensue when a woman lacks familial support.

Komashaku finds that the Genji Monogatari contains a "dark message" resulting from what she terms the "structural tragedy" (構造悲劇, *kôzô higeki*) (Komashaku, Messêji, 139) underlying women's lives.[61] She argues that the author's focus has by the end deliberately shifted to:

> unmarried women and critiques of marriage from women's points of view. From a male perspective, therefore, it appears that the tone of the

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[61] 宇治十条には、「源氏物語」の結論が提示されており、紫式部の色濃きメッセージがつまっているのである (Komashaku, Messêji, 221).

> text suddenly darkens in these final chapters, prompting traditional scholars to separate them from the rest of the text. According to this view, while the earlier section offers upbeat romantic stories set in elegant aristocratic society, the world of the final ten chapters is grim and abstruse. These Uji chapters, however, are not independent of the earlier part of the text; rather, they represent a necessary closure to the entire tale. (Komashaku, "Feminist Reinterpretation," 45)

Certainly, for my reading of the Genji as a text employing the boundary motif for social comment and protest, this final section does provide some sort of conclusion by demonstrating female survival through retreat to the limen itself. (I will return to the problematized notion of closure in the next and final section of this chapter.)

While more than one critic has praised "the absence of cruelty and violence" (Seidensticker, "Rough Business," 2) in the Genji, late 20th-century feminist critics have been actively reading the coercion back into many of its scenes, exposing disingenuous readings by generations of (male) critics who have minimized or even negated the trauma suffered by female characters. Komashaku Kimi and Setouchi Jakuchô in Japan and Norma Field and Doris Bargen in the West are among those who have questioned Genji's traditional status as romantic hero, for example.[62] I have already discussed Field's contention that a man's stolen glimpse of a woman suggests that he has figuratively raped her. Bargen's entire 1997 book posits that spirit possession throughout the tale is an expression of women's rage against masculine ill-treatment. Komashaku points out that it is impossible to distinguish seduction from rape in socio-cultural situations that render women weak and powerless, and thus in no position to grant consent or agree to be seduced.[63] Setouchi (a writer, critic and Buddhist nun whose own modern Japanese version of this text was published in 1998) argues that almost all sexual relations of the time begin with assault.[64]

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[62] As an aside, Genji-as-rapist is not solely a modern view—the 14th-century Lady Nijō styles a description of her own wedding night on Murasaki's—exaggerating the violence to the extent of depicting torn clothing and a bruised body (see Brazell 1-11).

There has, not surprisingly, been much backlash against what is often seen as a betrayal of the great masterpiece. Recent commentators have reacted by attempting to "establish[…] some credibility for Genji as a man of at least minimal principle" (Childs 1070). Tyler, in "Marriage, Rank and Rape in The Tale of Genji," is at great pains to downplay the issue, arguing that a 21st-century Western conception of consensual relations cannot and does not apply to the very different time and place described in Classical Japanese literature. Margaret Childs points to "the erotic potential of powerlessness" (Childs 1060) to argue that a male strategy of "mak[ing] vulnerability tangible" (Childs 1061) with a view to increasing feminine allure is common to depictions of romantic love in Heian Japan and should not be taken to equal sexual assault. The fact that a posture of incomprehension and passivity with regard to carnal matters is obligatory to aristocratic females in that culture cannot really be disputed. I would argue, however, that women's writing of the time engages with and counters that male strategy by leading readers to question why female vulnerability should be alluring in the first place.

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[63] 現在では、夫婦であってもいやがる相手に無理じいしたならば、それは強姦だと認識されている。この認識でいえば、夕顔は明らかに強姦されたといえる。弱い立場の女は簡単に諦めてしまうから、このような状態下では強姦と和姦はほとんど同義である (Komashaku, Messêji, 104).

[64] 可愛そうに、姫君はそこで男に手ごめにされてしまいます。つまり、この時代の姫君は、ほとんどはじめは男にレイプされて愛がはじまるのです (Setouchi 50).

The Eighth Prince's great secret was that, during the period he claimed to be exclusively mourning his late wife, he had become involved and fathered a child with that wife's niece and attendant. Ukifune bears the full brunt of his lapse, as the prince attempts to deflect its consequences by ejecting mother and child from his home and protection. This daughter grows up in first Michinokuni and then Hitachi province (both located far east of Heian-kyô), under the care of the mother and her husband, who was serving as governor or deputy governor. The maternal favourite, she is groomed for a fine marriage befitting her birth if not her present circumstances, but the boorish step-father acts to undermine these plans. By robbing her of this chance to marry, as explained above, he also robs her of a hitherto stable place within his family. Ukifune's mother, finding it necessary to remove her from the now intolerable situation at home, sends her to Nakanokimi's. Despite all the precautions taken by both Chûjô and Nakanokimi, here the heroine's troubles merely worsen as the crisis comes to a head.

Edith Sarra, likening her to Yûgao and another hapless character known as Suetsumuhana as an "icon[…] of marginality" (Sarra 141), comments that Ukifune "belongs to a group of figures whose stories hinge on an initial geographical and symbolic peripherality to, and eventual exclusion from, the world of the court" (Sarra 130). Ukifune is not, however, fated to remain safely peripheral (i.e., fully and decisively excluded from contact with the centre, which situation would nonetheless have its own compensations). Instead, her marginal status is underscored in countless humiliating ways owing to its ever more uncomfortable juxtaposition with powerful (male) characters who demonstrate insensitivity, if not outright cruelty.[65] Ukifune and others like her, however, "further isolate themselves by passively resisting the roles others would have them play .... The rhetorical play with limits underscores the shortcomings of that which is central" (Sarra 141). I argue here that one significant aspect of Murasaki Shikibu's "rhetorical play with limits," namely the material and metaphorical boundaries that have defined Ukifune and others, functions as an implicit critique of rigid gendered binaries and undermines the entire centre/margin paradigm.

The trauma of her story is ineluctably tied to patriarchal mistreatment. Bargen correctly writes that the significance of Ukifune's experience of being jilted lies "not in the broken marriage arrangement per se but rather in Hitachi's indecent failure to back his stepdaughter—an act that repeats her biological father's refusal to recognize her as his daughter" (Bargen 211). The young woman is again a cast-off child, rejected by both father figures. The chapter in which Ukifune first appears (やどり木, yadorigi, "The Ivy") opens with preparations for the Second Princess' donning of the train, which symbolizes her entrance into adult life. That young woman is grieving over the recent death of her mother when her imperial father offers explicit protection by welcoming her to the palace, but she has no maternal uncle to sponsor her. The Emperor therefore decides to give this princess to Kaoru who, despite some hesitation, does eventually marry her.[66] This alternative story of the Second Princess throws into relief the problem of Ukifune, who has no father making provisions for her future.

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[65] As for the other characters Sarra mentions, Yûgao suffers great emotional distress while involved with Genji's friend, Tô no Chûjô, and then mysteriously dies when she comes into contact with Genji himself, while the rather clueless Suetsumuhana, beloved daughter of the late Prince of Hitachi, is mocked behind her back by Genji for her old-fashioned taste and big red nose after he has initiated an affair with her.

Similarly, Nakanokimi serves in this tale as a tormenting image of what has been denied.[67] Despite the admittedly thorny problems that this half-sister faces with a womanizing husband and a mother-in-law (the empress), who does not consider her worthy of any significant degree of respect, Nakanokimi's career demonstrates what someone of not so dissimilar status can achieve so long as she has not suffered the initial, fatal setback of being rejected by the father. Her comparatively high status and the resultant sense of confidence give Nakanokimi the ability to fight for a relatively secure place as secondary wife to a member of the imperial family and mother of his son. Conversely, Ukifune's problematic connections to men who stand near the very echelons of androcentric power renders doubtful her attainment of any such manageable relationship with centrality. Because the status of both Niou and Kaoru is counterposed so starkly with her own, the margin proves for her an unsustainable position, subject to constant assailing, and she must try to attain a sort of "freedom of irrelevance" (Arntzen 42). (Ukifune here oddly serves to remind readers of the title character who, as a first-generation "Genji," also occupies a highly ambivalent position—no longer royal, but far too close to the Emperor to be deemed truly a commoner. Although he has been excluded from the succession and should pose no threat, Genji remains vulnerable to the schemings of the ambitious Kokiden faction.[68]) Ukifune's lack of liberty and agency stems from the fact that she is all too relevant (i.e., in her roles as conquest, possession, and substitute) to her suitors, not that this fact makes them any more aware of her as an individual.

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[66] A strong hint of the political ambitions and self-interest of this man who claims to want to retire from the world is given when Kaoru admits to himself that he might have been more eager if she had been daughter to the reigning empress as well (see 5:369; T:931; S:888).

[67] Note that Nakanokimi's role within the tale seems to be essentially to serve as an example, positive or negative, against which her sisters can compare themselves and their own fates. Ôigimi's determination never to accept Kaoru is based in great part on her observations of how her younger sister is (mis)treated by Niou—Nakanokimi is for her a cautionary tale of female dependence and vulnerability. For Ukifune, on the contrary, Nakanokimi's life serves to show how secure and happy a woman can be, given a bit of luck and an upbringing with paternal support.

Bargen claims that, "[i]n sharp contrast to the critical portrayal of the Eighth Prince by her mother, her half-sister, and her lady-in-waiting, Ukifune clings to an idealized portrait of her father" (Bargen 214). Ukifune's mother complains to a nurse that the prince, despite his much vaunted sensitivity, did not "treat her as a human being": 人類にも思さざりしかば, *jinrui ni mo omosazarisikeba* (6:30; T:981; S:943). A similar phrasing occurs a few pages later, when Chûjô tells Nakanokimi that Ukifune is "scorned as someone who is no one" because of her father's rejection: いとど人げなく人にも侮られたまふ, *itodo hitogenaku hito ni mo anazuraretamau* (6:43; T:986; S:949). Revealingly, the mother's "complaints are petty only if seen from the polygynous viewpoint of the dominant male aristocracy. Other women are sympathetic" (Bargen 215). Long-serving waiting women such as Taifu certainly take Chûjô's side (see, for example, 6:34; T:983; S:945). Ukifune's unparalleled flight from the future either Kaoru or Niou offers provides indisputable evidence that she realizes the inherent danger of the androcentric world, represented by father and lovers. Whereas Bargen argues that Ukifune cherishes illusions about her male parent, I believe the text describes a young woman with little choice but to make it appear that she does so. His failings cannot have escaped her; patriarchal cruelty is at the origin of all her troubles and her unmoored existence.

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[68] Kokiden is Genji's stepmother and his father's empress. She orchestrates his exile to Akashi.

Like so many ill-starred heroines of romance, Ukifune is caught in a mating game where the cards are stacked against her. She experiences a callous withholding of paternal protection: the biological father has refused to have anything to do with her, and the step-father, who has his own favourite among his many daughters, has abdicated all responsibility for Ukifune (their potential rival) to her mother. Not so long before, Ôigimi had chosen death as a means of defending her corporeal and psychological boundaries, under attack—albeit one that is conflicted and none too successful—by Kaoru following the death of her father. With Ukifune, Murasaki Shikibu now shows her readers what may happen subsequent to a failed suicide attempt by a completely fatherless woman. When neither bodily nor other barriers can be reinforced against breaches by the forces of masculinity, the only possible escape is to hide oneself in a third space independent of those perilous dichotomies, to flee into a non-place beyond male control. There is no other option: social anchorage is available solely via the father (and Ukifune has never had any chance in that corner) or a suitor (and neither of hers offers a safe haven). Accepting either Kaoru or Niou would mean living eternally vulnerable and humiliated, her lack of consequence underscored by painfully differentiated proximity to the power elite.

Turning the Binaries Inside-Out

Anthropologist Victor Turner has convincingly explained that "if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values or axioms of the culture in which it occurs" (Turner, Ritual Process, 167). Such scrutinizing of cultural ideals and operations is, in my view, precisely the objective of Murasaki Shikibu as regards Ukifune. A passage by French feminist Claudine Hermann (from a chapter of the 1976 Les Voleuses de langue entitled "Les Coordonnées féminines : espace et temps") helps, despite its essentialism, to explain what I have been demonstrating in relation to Ukifune's strategy of boundary embodiment:

> Matériel ou mental, l'espace de l'homme est un espace de domination et de hiérarchie, un espace de conquête et d'étalement, un espace plein.
>
> La femme au contraire a apprise de longue date à respecter non seulement l'espace matériel et mental d'autrui, mais l'espace pour lui-même, l'espace vide. C'est qu'il lui faut maintenir entre elle et les hommes qu'elle n'a pas choisis une distance qui est sa sauvegarde. Quant à ceux qu'elle a pu choisir, il faut aussi, pour éviter l'anéantissement total, pour se dérober à la vocation colonisatrice habituelle de l'homme, se ménager des plages, une espèce de no man's land, qui constitue précisément ce que les hommes ne comprennent pas chez elle et attribuent souvent à la stupidité car elle ne peut pas en exprimer la substance dans le langage aliéné qui est fatalement le sien.
>
> Le vide est donc pour elle une valeur respectable. (Hermann 139)

For Ukifune, neither marriage nor concubinage, Kaoru nor Niou, suicide nor a Buddhist renunciation of the world would seem ultimately to solve the matter of her alienated femininity. The repetition of concealment and exposure reveals the arbitrary boundaries defining her existence, boundaries that she has been helpless to control. Respecting and valuing an empty space, then, as an alternative to the full space colonized by men she has clearly not chosen, Ukifune opts for the void, which I have characterized as a boundary zone existing between insupportable binaries.

Whether or not the Genji was intended as a sort of "sex education manual" (as suggested by Setouchi),[69] it certainly reveals a careful examination and rather dismal view of male/female relations that Murasaki Shikibu must have felt obliged to pass on to the young empress she served. Shôshi was married to the Heir Apparent at the age of twelve, and so it requires no stretch of the imagination to see monogatari as being written and told/retold by her ladies-in-waiting with a view to instruction as well as entertainment. Yosano Akiko, an important Meiji-era poet (as well as translator of the Genji and other Classical texts into modern Japanese), once urged readers to pay attention to what she called "the staunch determination that lies beneath her [Murasaki Shikibu's] indirect turn of phrase" (qtd. in Rowley 203), and that is what I have aimed to do. Interestingly, Turner specifically writes of Heian court women as inhabiting the threshold. While I emphatically resist his dismissive view that Murasaki and her contemporaries were just "so many Mesdames Bovary, dissatisfied with real life" (Turner, "Performative Genres," 28),[70] our author—whom Turner characterizes a few lines later as a "liminal figure" (28) because of what was deemed her unfeminine classical learning—did eloquently chronicle certain negative realities of their world. Hérail comments how Murasaki Shikibu often focuses on

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[69] 彰子は十二歳に後宮に入られたんだけど、ねんねで、恋愛もセ久スも分からない。お人形みたいな人でしょう。つまり、「源氏」は一種の性教育本だったのよ (Tawara 45).

[70] Seidensticker, in the introduction to his translation of the Kagerô Nikki, makes a similar (and similarly ungracious) comment about author Michitsuna no Haha: "the diary is in a sense her protest against the marriage system of her time and her exposition of the thesis that men are beasts" (Seidensticker, Gossamer Years, 8). See also Ivan Morris, who remarks that the Kagerô Nikki constitutes "one long wail of jealousy by a woman in whom the emotion has attained hysterical proportions, and who gives vent in her writing to all the complaints, all the bitterness, all the tension that have accumulated during the long hours of waiting and that social convention prevents her from expressing in any more direct manner" (Morris, Shining Prince, 255).

> les aspects négatifs de la vie à la cour : l'impossibilité de s'isoler – les écrans et rideaux ne permettaient guère d'éviter les indiscrétions masculines –, les bavardages et cancans des autres dames, la présence fatigante de jeunes seigneurs, les inimitiés et jalousies, les plaisanteries qu'il fallait subir, les sobriquets dont on pouvait être affublé, la crainte des impairs et du ridicule. (Hérail 164)

I have argued that Murasaki explores via Ukifune the fertile possibilities that liminality offers for feminine resistance to exactly such difficulties of avoiding male indiscretions and social opprobrium.

We must bear in mind that readers have for centuries been enamoured of the attractive Ukifune and even wanted to become her. A famous example is Takasue's Daughter, author of the text we know as Sarashina Nikki, who writes sometime in the mid-eleventh century (i.e., a single generation after the Genji was produced):

> The height of my aspirations was that a man of noble birth, perfect in both looks and manners, someone like the Shining Prince Genji in the Tale, would visit me just once a year in the mountain village where he would have hidden me like Lady Ukifune. (Morris, Bridge of Dreams, 64)

Of course, the fantasy being ironically presented here has its facts wrong, in that the character of Genji dies long before that heroine comes on the scene. But perhaps that is precisely the point. The Sarashina diarist also writes:

> I was not a very attractive girl at the time, but I fancied that, when I grew up, I would surely become a great beauty with long flowing hair like Yûgao, who was loved by the Shining Prince, or like Ukifune, who was wooed by the Captain of Uji. Oh, what futile conceits!
> (Morris, Bridge of Dreams, 47)

Are we to understand that such dreams are futile because things did not end up as she had imagined, or because she is aware of the excessively romanticized and idealized interpretation that she had once given to the Genji's depiction of relationships? Chapters Three and Four of Sarra's Fictions of Femininity minutely and fascinatingly untangle what appear to be multiple viewpoints held by a single individual, analyzing how "the Sarashina nikki moves back and forth between a narrative voice that may be characterized as sounding older and wiser and that of a young woman—the narrator's earlier self" (Sarra 92). Takasue's Daughter does present her younger persona as a naïve, romantically-inclined reader, implying that a more realistic, mature, and clear-thinking individual would find little to envy in the pathetic tale of Ukifune's tortured existence. It is to this knowing readership that Murasaki Shikibu speaks directly.

One critic has commented that "[l]ike Ukifune, the male rivals hover in an indeterminate state of knowledge and repression. Throughout 'Ukifune,' they act as though in competition with each other for bringing Ukifune to the capital. It is as if at Uji—the misty territory beyond the scope of the law of the capital—Ukifune might belong to either" (Bargen 220). Or perhaps she might belong to herself.... In Heian-kyô, the site of centralized masculine power, she must belong to a man and assume her (subservient) place within the gendered hierarchical structure. In Uji, however, she manages to conceive a new way of living, informed by the memory of Ôigimi's own act of determined feminine resistance. Ukifune is inspired by her surroundings to emulate her predecessor and flee male clutches before the situation becomes utterly impossible.[71] Thus, Uji functions as a place for a feminocentric liminality that allows her to exist outside the world of masculine competition and domination.

Significantly enough, as I have hinted earlier, no clear, unambiguous termination for the tale of Ukifune, or for the Genji Monogatari as a whole, is provided. Murasaki Shikibu allows multiple possibilities of closure but imposes none. The story in fact rests on boundaries of its own, with any dénouement kept hidden from the reader, who is left to imagine for her/himself a resolution thus authorially denied. The Genji draws to a close with Kaoru departing Ono, having just been denied a chance to reconnect with the vanished Ukifune and wondering whether some unknown competitor for her favours has hidden the woman away from him.

The title of the 54th and final chapter, Yume no Ukihashi (夢の浮橋, normally translated as "The Floating Bridge of Dreams"), points to the occupation of an obviously transient space, not to mention one that is unreal. Does the author's refusal to conclude the story in a less ambivalent manner—assuming, of course, that the Genji was not simply left unfinished, which is always possible—demonstrate a desire to grant to her final heroine the option of crafting her own destiny, and to her (female) readers a similar privilege? Neither the centre nor the margin holds any attraction for Ukifune, who knows all too well that the spheres under political, patriarchal control offer no room for her to exist. The reader, like Kaoru, has been led along "a radically ambivalent path on which even death is no longer final but opens out onto a continual replay of transgression and denial" (Okada 292). This last heroine's insistently liminal existence challenges any reliance on certainties and undermines confidence in the bases on which patriarchal order is founded. Ukifune leaves us all betwixt and between, denied any closure other than that she contrives so inventively.

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[71] A few lines from Emily Dickinson's poem #273 come to mind: "He put the Belt around my life— / I heard the Buckle snap— / And turned away, imperial, / My Lifetime folding up—" (Johnson 124).

* * *

Masterpieces that can be considered synonymous with a national literature are few and far between: the Aeneid for the Roman Empire, the Divina Comedia for Italy, Don Quixote for Spain, and perhaps a handful of others. In the Japanese context, no other work comes at all close to the Genji Monogatari in epitomizing that country's literary heritage. For those interested in women's writing, this text also comprises a fascinating glimpse into a unique socio-cultural moment when female authorship was nurtured and esteemed. Comparatists, particularly those adopting a feminist stance, cannot afford to ignore it.

David Damrosch providentially closes his recent book What is World Literature? by listing a variety of possible options for reading the Genji within a comparative context. The most obvious is paired with Proust's similarly labyrinthine and introspective A la Recherche du temps perdu, an equation already made by other critics. He also suggests taking Murasaki Shikibu as a storyteller along the lines of Shahrazad and Boccaccio; as an author from the ancient world who deals with gender issues à la Christine de Pizan with her La Cité des Dames or Gottfried with his

Tristan; or as offering a woman's view of court culture to be contrasted with Madame de Lafayette's La Princesse de Clèves. My own analysis places this text in what I hope establishes yet another rewarding juxtaposition, by focussing on the liminality metaphor that Murasaki Shikibu and other women writers employ to subvert the romance paradigm of patriarchal courtship. In the third and fourth chapters, I will turn my attention to fictional characters in 18th-century England and 20th-century U.S.A., respectively, who literalize a feminine embodiment of the boundary as they negotiate gendered relationships. But first I turn to a medieval European lai by Marie de France that (dis)similarly to Ukifune's story also depicts a woman and her almost fatal confrontation with damaging social binaries. Chapter Two will accordingly demonstrate another means of employing the liminal to explode the rigid and oppressive structures of masculine/feminine, centre/margin, and power/weakness, and create a space of preparation for a better future than that which the heroine sees looming on her horizon.

Wife/Not-Wife: Guilliadun's Suspended Animation

The day when mountains move has come.
Though I say this, nobody believes me.
Mountains sleep only for a little while
That once have been active in flames.
But even if you forgot it,
Just believe, people,
That all the women who slept
Now awake and move.
- Yosano Akiko

The Threshold of Art?

If Murasaki Shikibu's masterwork is "filled with women who disrupt masculine schemes" (Okada 173), the same might be said of several of the lais (verse narratives) composed by Marie de France some 150 years later and halfway around the world. Writing both within and against the courtly romance tradition, this French author likewise portrays a wide range of heroines who function as active, thinking participants in their own stories, adroitly countering disadvantageous circumstances and systemic inequities. Medievalists such as Joan Ferrante and Glyn S. Burgess have already underscored the vital part female characters play with regard to plot development and resolution in this collection of Old French poems. In The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Context, the latter writes: "Physically the heroines reflect the twelfth-century stereotype, but they are especially quick-witted and ever capable of winning some form of victory over the men who oppress them" (Burgess, Text and Context, x). This chapter will reveal how Guilliadun in Eliduc (the last and longest of Marie's lais) employs a strategy that is intriguingly similar to that employed by Ukifune in the Genji Monogatari. Through her innovative handling of the impossible love triangle in which she finds herself caught, Guilliadun manages (like her Japanese counterpart) not only to register protest about the socially constructed vulnerability of female bodies and selves, but also eventually to see that her needs are met. Further, she accomplishes all this while remaining superficially passive and subservient, thus ostensibly respecting the role behaviours prescribed for her sex.

As we saw in Chapter One, much of Ukifune's life is tinged with liminality. While the limen operates in Eliduc more as a discrete moment in the story, the fact that the liminar motif is again specifically used to accord a voice to a silenced, exploited female subject renders this lai a fascinating point of comparison with the Uji chapters and their final heroine. Other factors also render the juxtaposition worthwhile. For example, despite the obvious socio-cultural, historical differences separating Murasaki Shikibu and Marie de France, certain commonalities are reflected in their access to and reason for writing. As the editors of Crossing the Bridge: Comparative Essays of Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers explain:

> Restrictions on women in the two patriarchal cultures were similar in their limitations on formal access to power, education, and self-determination. But interestingly they both also provided opportunities that allowed women to develop their literary skills: openings appeared for individually gifted women, vernacular spaces created new audiences, and new genres lent opportunity to express feminine issues. (Stevenson and Ho xiii-xiv)

The 12th-century European "renaissance" certainly met such emancipating conditions, contradictory as they may have been, and Marie de France is exemplary of those talented women who used their literary skills and the new possibilities offered by the vernacular to speak powerfully on issues of particular significance to their audiences. In this chapter, I will build upon my preceding discussion of liminality in the Genji Monogatari and demonstrate that both that text and Eliduc, far from being about the purported hero (the traditional view), or even about the women with whom he becomes involved (the more recent view), are actually on some profound level about the difficulties women encounter in successfully negotiating interpersonal relations and social transitions under a patriarchal system. Ukifune and Guilliadun unilaterally light upon a creative strategy for resolving a quintessentially female crisis, and that strategy can be usefully described in terms of Victor Turner's work on the limen. Through her exploration of a body/boundary image based on the threshold's dual role as restrictive barrier and welcome refuge, Marie de France, like Murasaki Shikibu, engages dynamically with the prevailing conceptions of gender, power, and subjecthood.

Both women writers make use of available literary conventions, but they eloquently respond to and surpass these conventions, redefining them to express a self-consciously female perspective. Along with the authors belonging to the English literary tradition whom I will discuss in subsequent chapters, they must be recognized as "women whose works reflect awareness of their condition as women and as women writers" (Blain, Clements, and Grundy ix). In Ferrante's To the Glory of Her

Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts, Marie de France is linked with Christine de Pizan and other medieval authors as constituting a tradition,

> not in the sense that the women necessarily knew of one another and could consciously imitate the actions or writings of earlier figures, but in the sense that all the women living public lives in whatever sphere faced the same kinds of challenges and prejudices as women.... All of them struggled to succeed in their worlds, not in small part because they were women, and most of them have for a time been deprived of their proper place in political, religious, or literary history because they were women. (Ferrante, Glory of Her Sex, 213)

A firm belief in the value of examining the commonalities of how women have been "writing, in whatever form, women's lives and women's selves" (Blain, Clements, and Grundy ix) across time and culture underwrites this entire dissertation project.

On one undeniably important level, Eliduc functions as the final stage in its author's exploration of romantic entanglements: namely, an ultimate, selfless love, represented by the actions of the eponymous hero's first wife.[72] This interpretation has been exhaustively analyzed elsewhere, providing very helpful insights on issues such as the meaning of Guildeluëc's generous renunciation in the context of medieval Christianity. My own interest for the purposes of this dissertation, however, lies with the other heroine of this story and her extraordinary and extraordinarily subversive response to vulnerability, betrayal, and exploitation. I will thus focus on how this particular narrative poem directly urges the reader to question gendered social practices and hierarchies by examining the implications of "existential liminality" (Bargen 220) for a young woman (i.e., Guilliadun, the second wife) who is faced with an unsustainable dichotomy that threatens her social, emotional, and even physical survival. The liminal state of suspended animation (manifested as an extended swoon) to which Guilliadun temporarily withdraws is for this reader a striking example of boundary appropriation designed to achieve the resolution of an emotional and socio-cultural quandary. It has been pointed out that narration of liminal events can transform the literary work "into a tool for interrogating and re-imagining social values and power arrangements" (Gilead 306). In Marie de France, the embodied boundary does in fact critique prevalent arrangements and the disequilibria of power underlying the institutions that govern the lives of her characters. Faced with what one critic has seen as "the traditional suppression and containment of the female" (Ho 133) by patriarchal forces in medieval Europe, Heian Japan, and elsewhere, Guilliadun shrewdly opts for the further restraint of liminal suspension. While this condition would seem to deny her the ability to speak or to act, and thus be merely self-defeating, the self-induced, strategic nature of her fainting fit paradoxically puts her in control of her own containment and actually allows a rewriting of the future others would impose upon her.

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[72] For an in-depth discussion of this theme, see especially Mickel, "A Reconsideration of the Lais of Marie de France."

Many scholars dealing with this lai have focused on Eliduc as a man torn between two women.[73] Others have concentrated on Guildeluëc, as the self-sacrificing wife who yields everything in the name of perfect, unselfish love.[74] Few have looked seriously at Guilliadun, the young woman who inadvertently initiates the crisis for all three characters by falling in love with and pursuing a man she does not at first know is married. Those who have considered this heroine at all have tended to content themselves with praising her "naïveté touchante" (B. Wind qtd. in Ménard, Les Lais, 117) or dismissing her as an "[e]njeu féodal d'abord, [qui] devient demoiselle courtoise et bientôt princesse de conte merveilleux" (Sienaert 168). The character of Guilliadun is much more than a pawn or two-dimensional Sleeping Beauty, however, and she therefore warrants closer attention and interest.

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[73] This is a relatively common (and commonly misogynist) motif in medieval poetics. I will discuss below how Marie de France's innovative angle turns it into a powerful tool for social protest.

[74] These analyses often concern the "calumniated wife" or so-called Griselda motif (from the long-suffering woman in Chaucer's "The Clerk's Tale"). I will pick up on this theme below.

Ferrante is among those who rightly insist that we not consider premodern women as always and unequivocally helpless:

> I do not deny that religious and secular patriarchy, not to say misogyny, inhibited women in many ways, but I think it is far more important to recognize that it could not exclude them from all power or influence. … That many women were victims I certainly do not deny, but that not a few of them were able to control their lives is an equally important fact. (Ferrante, Glory of Her Sex, 5)

All of the heroines discussed in this dissertation seize control of certain aspects of their lives, refusing to become or remain mere victims despite the misogynistic attitudes and exploitive values ranged against them. By occupying a calculated state of liminality, Guilliadun herself makes a surprisingly successful bid for release from the suffocating destiny of the romantic plot line—which, as Emily Dickinson once put it, calls for a woman to submit to being "Born—Bridalled—Shrouded—" (Johnson #1072), each predictable phase of a woman's life following relentlessly upon the previous. Accordingly, the threshold represents in Eliduc an important site of discourse regarding female oppression, subversion, and empowerment. In her intriguing study, French Women Writers and the Book: Myths of Access and Desire, Tilde A. Sankovitch writes that Marie "obliterates a possible marginality-as-exclusion, and replaces it with marginality-as-distinction" (Sankovitch 26), but I will show that Guilliadun more precisely embraces not a form of marginality but rather liminality as a way to distinguish and liberate herself from an excluded, disenfranchised position. This heroine is instinctively aware that power lies not in the margin, but rather on the limen that separates margin from centre, the dividing line that renders all such distinctions meaningful. The deliberate choice of an embodied hiatus can therefore circumvent the unfavourable binary oppositions this romance heroine encounters with regard to her problematic, uncategorizable femininity.

In all of her writings, Marie de France creates characters "who subtly defy traditional social categories, often blurring or transgressing easy distinctions between male and female, human and beast" (Krueger 81). With even greater subtlety, she also undermines other, socially constructed binaries by locating Guilliadun, for instance, "'betwixt and between' all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification" (Turner, Forest of Symbols, 97). From the moment she learns the truth of her lover's marriage until the time she and Eliduc are themselves wed, Guilliadun functions as a quintessential liminar: "no longer classified and not yet classified" (Turner, Forest of Symbols, 96). No longer an unmarried daughter ensconced in the paternal home, but not yet a wife in another man's house, Guilliadun serves to problematize the limited options and roles available to women. If a female cannot easily be categorized as either virgin or wife, she is by definition marginalized, barred from the centre where all power and status reside. In Eliduc, Marie de France destabilizes that all too easy centre/margin distinction. Our heroine is a young woman without any direct, obvious access to power, who must negotiate interpersonal contracts that accord her but an inconsequential part. The symbolically orphaned, betrayed, and utterly exposed Guilliadun finds herself with nowhere to "be" legitimately, and therefore, unable to find any secure place within the bounds that class members of her sex as either lady or "whore," she prefers the no-man's-land of the dividing line itself. Because her embodiment as a female constitutes the romance heroine's crisis, Guilliadun employs that body/boundary to subvert the gendered binary based on hierarchical, oppressive cultural practices.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, widespread opinion held that Marie de France "stops on the threshold of art," never quite attaining true literariness, but instead merely "emit[ting] a delicate little fountain of poetry, limpid and slight" (Joseph Bédier, qtd. in Bloch 16). More recent scholarship counters such condescending attitudes, finding much of value in this author and her production. C. S. Lewis' seminal work from 1964, The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature, cites Marie as an example of the best type of medieval author, whose work exhibits a striking "absence of strain. … The writing is so limpid and effortless that the story seems to be telling itself. … But in reality no story tells itself. Art is at work" (Lewis 205). In the Introduction to their important translation of the Lais from 1978, Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante point out the highly nuanced analysis of intimacy and subjectivity that she offers. They comment that "Marie's art avoids easy generalizations such as 'married love is wrong, adultery right,' or the reverse, but demonstrates instead that character, fortune, and the ability to seize and manipulate opportunities interact in any love relationship" (Hanning and Ferrante 2). R. Howard Bloch's very recent book entitled The Anonymous Marie de France (2003) insists that she be recognized as "an extraordinarily coherent, sophisticated poet … as serious, authentic, and as subjectively agonized and unified as any writer in the so-called age of authorship" (Bloch 13) that constitutes our modern times. I will argue that France's first woman of letters does and is all this and more, intelligently and deliberately employing what Philippe Ménard in "Marie de France et nous" has called her "art de suggérer … souvent fait de demi-teintes" (Ménard, "Marie de France et nous," 24) to challenge dichotomous social structures. By locating Guilliadun on literal and figurative thresholds, Marie de France demonstrates how a more sustainable relationship between the lovers may be achieved and makes a case for more equitable terms for both sexes in society as a whole.

Background

So who was Marie? Despite the lengthy history of readerly interest her texts have enjoyed,[75] not to mention minute scholarly attention to the texts and contexts associated with this author, we know next to nothing about her.[76] As with Murasaki

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[75] Five manuscripts survive from the 13th and 14th century and there were medieval translations into Old Norse, Middle English, Middle High German, Italian and Latin, all of which testify to her enduring popularity. Ménard also reminds us that modern interest in Marie has been continuous since 1820 (Ménard, "Marie de France et nous," 7).

[76] Bloch seeks to claim this teasingly incomplete identification as a deliberate strategy on the part of the author: "Marie sets the limits of obscurity, calibrates the gap between what we know and what we do not know of her, negotiates the degree of her anonymity" (Bloch 11).

Shikibu, even the sobriquet is merely one of convenience, raising more questions than it answers. The first reference made to a "Marie de France" is by Claude Fauchet in 1581 (in his Recueil de l'origine de la langue et poésie françoise), a phrase he coined from the authorial comment "Marie ai nom, si sui de France"[77] found in the epilogue to the Fables (Spiegel 256). General consensus is that this Old French version based mostly on the Aesopic tradition is by the same "Marie" who gave us the Lais (lines 3 and 4 of the first, Guigemar, read: "Oëz, seignur, que dit Marie, / ki en sun tens pas ne s'oblie"[78]), as well as the Espurgatoire Seint Patriz (the epilogue to this translation from the Latin contains the lines: "Jo, Marie, ai mis en memoire, / le livre de l'Espurgatoire, / en romanz, qu'il seit entendables / a laie gent e covenables"[79]). While it is possible that these were in fact three different women entirely, certain similarities of style, tone, and content in the works suggest otherwise. As well, given the fact that in all of these interjections she identifies herself as "Marie" and that a contemporary similarly refers to an author known as "dame Marie," with neither apparently feeling any need to be more specific, it is probable that we are dealing with a single individual, quite well-known in her day.

She was born in twelfth-century France (possibly the Île de France or Bretagne/Brittany)—obviously to a wealthy family, if we are to judge by her level of education—and likely spent some years in London at the Anglo-Norman court of Henry II (Henry Plantagenet, r. 1154-89) and his wife, the famed Eleanor of Aquitaine. The queen, previously married for 15 years to Louis VII, was the granddaughter of Guilhem (or Guillaume) IX, France's first great troubadour poet, and had been raised in the refined, elegant atmosphere permeating the provençal court. She was also a patron of the arts in her own right, as was her daughter Marie de Champagne, and her son Richard the Lion-Hearted was a poet. Again like her Japanese near contemporary, Marie must have moved within a highly literate and cultured milieu that offered unprecedented opportunities for female creativity and a receptive audience for her work.[80] Marco D. Roman, in an essay entitled "Reclaiming the Self through Silence," underscores the impressive resemblances with the social environment around the time of Murasaki Shikibu:

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[77] "My name is Marie and I am from France." All translations, except where otherwise noted, are my own.

[78] "Listen, gentlemen, to what Marie has to say; her time has come, and she will not fail."

[79] "I, Marie, have preserved in French this book of Purgatory, so that laypeople can understand and have access to it."

> medieval France and Heian Japan invite comparison not only because of the rich courtly culture that flourished during these historical periods but also—and more particularly—because of the formative role women of the court played in the emergence of vernacular literature in each of these traditions. (Roman 175)

In short, then, the reality in both contexts undermines any facile assumption regarding the absence of female voices and influence from even the earliest stages of literature in French or Japanese. The tremendous impact these court women of centuries past have had on the development of prose and poetry and the representation of women in their own and other languages virtually demands examination from a comparative, feminist perspective.

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[80] Hanning and Ferrante remind us that Marie de France "wrote as an expert on love and storytelling for the first large, sophisticated, and elite audience of medieval Europe—an audience that appreciated, as we can, the inventiveness as well as the charm and power of her love tales" (Hanning and Ferrante, "Introduction," 3).

The three texts currently ascribed to Marie de France, as listed above, were written somewhere around the third quarter of the 1100s. By 1181, a woman again known simply as Marie was serving as Abbess of Shaftsbury, and many scholars suggest that she was none other than our author, in no small part because of the education it is assumed such a position would require.[81] The writer Marie is definitely proud of her learning, and makes a point of informing readers that she knows Latin and English, as well as at least some Breton. Thus, contrary to the custom of the day for women writers, she declines to adopt a humble pose regarding her accomplishments, [82] instead asserting her linguistic and literary gifts and a perceived obligation to share a God-given intellectual capacity with others:

> Qui Deus a duné esciënce
> e de parler bone eloquence,
> ne s'en deit taisir ni celer,
> ainz se deit voluntiers mustrer. (Prologue, ll. 1-4)[83]

This self-described knowledgeable, eloquent woman then goes on confidently to dedicate her lais to a nobles reis ("noble king"), who may well have been Henry II. Virtually everything else about her life remains by and large guesswork: "we simply do not possess sufficient documentation to allow conjecture to reach closure" (Bloch

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[81] We are unlikely ever to achieve a positive identification of either this author or the works she produced. It is intriguing to consider that, as Julia Boffey points out, if the Abbess and Marie are indeed the same person, "then her linguistic and compositional skills were presumably also put to use in scholarly and administrative capacities as well as creative ones (perhaps manifesting themselves in forms which were physically ephemeral or whose connection with Marie went unrecorded)" (Boffey 160).

[82] Medieval authors such as Hildegard and Christine de Pizan generally follow the quondam conventions demanding female humility, even or perhaps especially of women who dared play a public role. The 10th-century nun Hrotsvit is often pointed out as an author who makes a point of exaggerating this posture with her extensive use of diminutives and self-deprecating language.

[83] "Those to whom God has granted knowledge and a way with words should remain neither silent nor secretive, but instead speak out with no hesitation."

9). Nevertheless, neither the paucity of extant texts nor their author's near total anonymity prevents Marie de France from taking a prominent place in the Western canon. And for those interested in women's writing in particular, her importance cannot be overemphasized.

By the mid-twelfth century, texts of war and bravery were being replaced by romans ("romances") such as Eneas, the Roman de Thèbes, and the Tristan and Arthurian stories, all of which contain a more developed love angle. A roman differs from a lai in several respects: it is longer, for example, and tends to relate a number of adventures rather than focus on one alone. Regardless, both are similar in their marked contrast with earlier genres concerning the degree of importance given to romantic and sexual desire. If, as Ernest Hoepffner writes, the lai is to the roman as the short story is to the novel (Hoepffner 48), Marie must be recognized as the acknowledged master of the medieval short story. It is understood that musical compositions inspired by tales of love and chivalry, which she presumably heard performed by jongleurs (itinerant minstrels from Brittany), comprised her source material.

While none of the original Breton lais survives, it is assumed that they were sung, and may even have been performed as instrumentals only. Marie's version of the lai, a term that for her seems synonymous with conte ("tale"), was recited or read. Whether or not Marie invented this genre as a narrative poem (Chrétien de Troyes was also writing lais at this time, and it is unclear if he had read her work), she is definitely the writer most closely identified with it. Michelle Freeman is among those critics who prefer that a clear distinction be made between Breton songs and Marie's octosyllabic rhymed couplets: "[t]he ancients heard of an adventure, wanted to commemorate it, so composed a lai out of the adventure. Marie heard the lai, wanted to commemorate it, so wrote her poem about the lai" (Freeman, "Poetics of Silence," 864). However, for the sake of convenience, I will follow established terminology and refer to these dozen poems as lais. In any case, whatever the form or content of her sources and her indebtedness to them, Marie's own style is economical, even minimal, demonstrating what has been called an "esthétique de la brièveté" (de Combarieu qtd. in Warren 189). Her verses employ simple, straightforward phrasing and a limited vocabulary. It should be borne in mind that courtly descriptions of knights and ladies as pruz ("worthy"), sage ("wise"), bele ("beautiful"), vallianz ("valiant"), curteis ("courtly"), etc., evoke an entire code of conduct and a wealth of literary allusion that would have been immediately familiar to her audience. Therefore, such lexical repetition in no way means that the writing is flat or lacking in complexity. As Emanuel J. Mickel notes: "Marie's breadth of learning, her charming, subtle literary style, sagacious mind, and sensitive spirit are captivating" (Mickel, Marie de France, 23), and she earned and continues to earn a devoted readership for those very qualities.

Her contributions to laying the foundations for the modern novel have also been widely recognized:

> The line of European narrative fiction that uses the portrayal of love as a means for exploring the interaction of self and society, appearance and reality, descends continuously from the twelfth-century courtly narrative to the twentieth-century novel. Marie is thus one of the

> creators—the only woman among them—of a grand tradition that has shaped and defined our literary culture. (Hanning and Ferrante 5)

This comment indicates the iconic stature of Marie de France in determining the development of the romance mode and thus our present-day reading of male-female relationships in literature as well as in life, and the fact of her femaleness is of the utmost significance. Her work has been called "the first indisputably feminine view of the human comedy expressed through art" (Fowles ix) within the Western tradition. Clearly, as the texts demonstrate and a vast array of new scholarship by eminent critics such as Ferrante, Bloch, and others has emphasized, she was concerned with providing a woman's point of view and a more nuanced understanding of gender relations than that found in most of the poetry and prose of her day. The European Middle Ages was a heavily misogynist period, with religious and other texts commonly denigrating women as descendents of the temptress Eve. Marie's analysis of women's lives and loves is, by contrast, incisive, and the ironic gaze she focuses on social and sexual mores remains a potent one.

Rereading Eliduc

At 1184 lines, Eliduc is much longer than all the other lais authored by Marie—in fact ten times as long as the shortest (Chevrefoil, with only 118 lines).[84] It appears in final position in the British Museum's mid-thirteenth-century Harley Manuscript 978, our earliest extant version and that which follows the textual arrangement to which most critics and scholars subscribe.[85] This is the only manuscript to include Eliduc, generally considered to be the last lai authored by Marie de France and thus a mature work likely intended to sound a concluding note and provide thematic closure for these narrative poems as a whole. It concerns some fairly convoluted relationships and, with its highly nuanced, sophisticated treatment of those involved, is in many ways "the perfect conclusion to Marie's treatment of the nature of love" (Mickel, "Reconsideration," 61).

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[84] If one excludes Eliduc and Chevrefoil at the two extremes, Marie's other ten lais average just over 400 lines apiece.

The aventure or storyline is relatively straightforward: the Breton hero loses the favour of his lord through slander and sets off to sell his services as a mercenary, leaving behind a beautiful, loyal wife by the name of Guildeluëc. He rapidly defeats the enemy of a king near Exeter, earning that king's gratitude and the love of his daughter, Guilliadun. Eliduc is suddenly called home to assist the first lord but, as soon as possible, he sails back across the Channel to carry off the innocent young princess. During a storm at sea, a sailor reveals Eliduc's secret and is promptly killed by him, but not before Guilliadun learns that he is already married and faints away in shock. Upon arrival back in France, he deposits her apparently dead body in a chapel. Shortly thereafter, Guildeluëc has her mysteriously despondent husband followed and discovers the comatose young woman. She manages to revive Guilliadun with the supernatural assistance of a pair of weasels, gives the couple her blessing, and promptly retires to a convent, allowing them to wed. The story ends many years later, with all of the partners in this odd romantic triangle having devoted their lives to God.

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[85] There has been significant debate about the original order of the lais. Burgess (Text and Context) sets forth a coherent argument for an alternative arrangement (still maintaining Eliduc as the final poem), whereas Margaret Boland argues that the current order is in fact a tour de force of literary architecture. As an aside, the proper ordering of the Genji chapters has also been a subject of discussion over the centuries.

In his important La Poésie du Moyen Age : Leçons et Lectures dating from 1906, Gaston Paris—who admires this lai as "le chef-d'oeuvre de Marie de France, et l'une des oeuvres les plus poétiques que nous ait laissées le moyen âge" (Paris 119)—provides details of Continental legends based on the "mari aux deux femmes" or Saracen bride motif that flesh out the tradition within which Marie was writing. Paris begins by describing a medieval tombstone in Germany, which depicts a man lying between two women. This image gave rise to a story about a Count of Gleichen who, while on crusade in the East, is rescued and liberated by the daughter of a king, on condition that he marry her. The first wife, when apprised of the situation, agrees with her husband that he had no choice but to do so in order to save his own life, and the threesome subsequently lives harmoniously together. There is also a French legend concerning a certain Gilles de Trasignies who, in the mistaken belief that his wife is dead, likewise marries a Muslim princess. When these women learn of each other's existence, they both immediately retire to a convent, and poor Giles goes from having two wives at once to suddenly having none at all. Paris argues that the Celtic tradition on which Marie de France draws actually predates the Crusades. He finds evidence of its greater antiquity in the contrasting justifications of these three bigamous heroes, concluding as follows:

> Gilles de Trasignies, qui croit sa femme morte, est tout à fait innocent; la faute du comte de Gleichen est attenuée par l'impérieuse nécessité; celle d'Éliduc n'a d'excuse que l'amour, et en cela notre lai paraît avoir un caractère plus ancien. La mort apparente de la deuxième femme, le trait si profondément poétique de la pitié que la vue de sa

> beauté inanimée fait naître au cœur de la première, ne se retrouvent pas dans les récits postérieurs : on peut croire que ces circonstances appartiennent à la forme la plus ancienne du conte et qu'elles se sont perdues avec le temps, par la faute de narrateurs qui ne savaient plus en apprécier la beauté touchante. (Paris 125)

In any case, whether these men act out of innocence, necessity, or sheer love, they all commit an act that violates church and civil law and puts their wives in a more than awkward position. I will return to the questions surrounding Eliduc's behaviour and the relationship between Guildeluëc and Guilliadun below.

A medieval text closely associated with Eliduc is Gautier d'Arras' Ille et Galeron, written in or about the 1170s. This lengthy lai of some 6500 lines is generally considered a response to Marie's story, but may have been produced independently of hers, with the strong resemblance due simply to the use of an identical source.[86] Whatever the textual relationship, a comparison offers much food for thought regarding how an author's gender may impact how a tale is told. Gautier's work deals with Eliduc's son Ille, who is initially married to Galeron. Following an accident and disfigurement that he fears will cost him her affections, he flees their country for the east and eventually, convinced that his beloved is deceased, agrees under some duress to marry Ganor, an emperor's daughter. The first wife resurfaces some time later and, despite Ille's stated wish to resume their married life, she takes the veil rather than cost him the political and economic advantages acquired through his second marriage.

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[86] W. Ann Trindade's 1974 article on a number of antecedents and analogues to the "man with two wives" theme intriguingly sets forth arguments for and against the existence of an "Ur-Eliduc" version.

Many lines are given over to descriptions of battle (Ille is, naturally, a valiant knight), and the love story is overlaid with a strongly moralizing tone. Gautier excises all of the supernatural or "unrealistic" elements to be found in Marie's lai, such as the mysterious death-like trance, the magical flower introduced by an anthropomorphized weasel, and the miraculous resurrection of the beloved. He takes a great deal of care to explain and justify Ille's motivation and reactions, never lapsing from a heroic personification. Further, he displays less interest in developing the women characters than does his female counterpart.

Eliduc should also be read against the legend of Tristan and his two Isoldes. Both the Anglo-Norman Thomas and the French Béroul wrote their versions in the late 12th century, and thus these were contemporaneous with Marie's work.[87] In her collection, the lai at the other extreme to Eliduc with regard to length (i.e., Chevrefoil) actually relates an episode involving Tristan, and so we know that Marie was familiar with that tale of tragic love. This adulterous triangle differs significantly from that of Eliduc in that Tristan marries the second Isolde but not the first, who is already married to his uncle Mark. As well, he remains steadfastly faithful to the first Isolde, whereas Eliduc, of course, eventually succumbs to the attractions of another and transfers his affections from his legal, and loyal, wife.

Although many other stories may deal with a man caught between two women, therefore, none does so with quite the same finesse as Marie. Her emphasis is decidedly different from that in those other tales of Tristan, the count of Gleichen, Gilles de Trasignies, or Ille et Galeron in that, just as with the Genji, her lai is less about the hero than the women with whom he is involved. In fact, she tells us that while it had originally been called "Eliduc," the story has by her day come to be known as "Guildeluëc ha Guilliadun" (l. 22; the "ha" being Breton for "and"). Her explanation of the title change leaves no doubt as to which Marie prefers:

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[87] The German Tristan by Gottfried von Strassburg dates from the early 13th century.

> D'eles dous a li lais a nun
> Guildeluëc ha Guilliadun.
> 'Eliduc' fu primes nomez,
> mes ores est li nun remuëz,
> kar des dames est avenu
> l'aventure dunt li lais fu. (ll. 21-26)[88]

This insistence on what things are or should be called, suggesting that names may be shifting, unreliable things—what Saussure called the arbitrariness of the sign—is a common preoccupation of Marie. Throughout the lais, she is very much concerned with naming, making a point of explaining what a given story is called in various languages. For example, Marie introduces her werewolf tale Bisclavret by pointing out that the equivalent term in French is "garou" ("Bisclavret a nun en Breton, Garulf l'apelent li Norman," ll. 3-4) and Laüstic begins with the following multilingual clarifications:

> Une aventure vus dirai,
> dunt li Bretun firent uin lai.
> L'Aüstic a nun, ceo m'est vis,
> si l'apelent en lur païs ;
> ceo est russignol en Franceis

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[88] "It is from these two that the lai gets its name, 'Guildeluëc ha Guilliadun.' It was first called 'Eliduc,' but now the name has changed because the story behind the lai happened to the women."

> e nihtegale en dreit Engleis. (ll. 1-6)[89]

In any event, the controversy with regard to title forces a closer look at the relative importance of the three main characters in the lai under discussion here.

Whether or not the "corrected" Breton name can without recourse to an anachronism be termed "le titre 'féministe'" (Ménard, Les Lais, 79), it is explicitly female-centred and does strongly suggest something of the author's own attitude toward her text. Ménard quite interestingly points out that in the six lais named after the hero (i.e., Guigemar, Equitan, Bisclavret, Lanval, Milon, and Yonec) the heroines remain anonymous (Ménard, Les Lais, 79). Is Marie suggesting that a world so clearly marked masculine has little room for women as individuals in their own right? If that is the case, then her desire for this final lai to have as title the names of its two heroines can be read as a direct instruction for the reader to look to the women rather than the man.

Responding to Fin'amors

Like Japan's Heian period, the times in which Marie lived witnessed a great cultural flourishing, particularly regarding literature written in the vernacular. Although the European Middle Ages (500-1500 AD) are often considered overall as a rather unsatisfactory gap between the glories of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance,[90] the twelfth century generally stands apart. This was a period of quite revolutionary innovation that set the terms by which much of the modern world now operates. Comparatist Maria Tymoczko describes something akin to a literary sea change:

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[89] "I'll tell you a story that the Bretons made into a lai. They call it Laüstic in their country, it seems to me: that's "Le rossignol" in French and "The Nightingale" in correct English."

[90] As an aside, this period is thus itself rendered explicitly liminal by such characterization. Comparatist Caroline Eckhardt is among those critics calling for a new name to replace what she calls such "apologetic labels" as "medieval" or "Middle Ages." As she writes, "why do we denominate a

> The twelfth century marks one of the most significant transitions in Western culture: the shift from epic to romance. The change is one of poetics, of course; it represents the transition from traditional oral hero tale to written, author-innovated literature. … The transition is also an ideological one. It involves the turning from a warrior ethos to courtly codes and the celebration of romantic love. (qtd. in Bassnett 142)

Marie de France plays a central role in this development with her narrative verse that focuses distinctly and idiosyncratically on amorous exploits. In a century characterized as one of the "very few real moments of historical mutation" (Bloch 19), her Lais rank among its central texts.

Earlier literature had tended toward the more public epic or chanson de geste, concerned with a heroic age of kings fighting battles for power, wealth, and glory. Hoepffner writes pointedly that the "chanson de geste primitive ignore l'amour et la femme" (Hoepffner 9). Literary tastes were now changing, with emphasis on the warrior waning in favour of depictions of a distinctly private world where relations with women take on an increasingly significant role. As one scholar puts it:

> Epic belonged to the Great Hall, romance to what the French called the Chamber …. One was chanted or recited to a large mixed assembly, the other read aloud to a small homogeneous company. The former

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thousand years of cultural production by the fact that they are located "in between" other ages? Does not every age, except perhaps for the last, constitute the middle element of a chronological sandwich?" (Eckhardt 7).

> was predominantly masculine, the other predominantly feminine.
>
> (Dominica Legge qtd. in McCash 23)

Marie's lais reflect this shift in her decided focus on intimate affairs of the heart rather than episodes of valour on a grand stage of war.[91]

It has been famously claimed by E. R. Curtius in his seminal European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages that romantic love was invented or at least rediscovered for the West in 12th-century France. Although more bellicose literature continued to appear, alongside religious writing such as lives of the saints, texts dealing with fin'amors had become extremely popular. Essentially, fin'amors, or courtly love, involves a knight's worship of a refined ideal personified by a dompna, or lady. Although the knight is himself ennobled merely by loving her, his passion is generally doomed to remain unrequited. In this feudal expression of love, just as a vassal serves his lord, the lover is expected to serve his lady, obeying her commands and whims with absolute fealty in exchange for little, if any, reward.

For the standard model for the literature of courtly love, we must look to medieval French court poets known as troubadours. The term literally means "finder" or "inventor" in that their poetry was considered so innovative, tackling matters of love in a vernacular (Provençal, then known as lenga d'oc), which had never before been deemed capable of bearing the weight of literature. In these lyrics, a man tells of his desire for an aloof and already married woman, often the wife of his lord (this higher status explains the attitude of abject adoration he assumes). The literary conventions of this time allow only the male to be viewed as lover, and so the female is cast in a passive role, with the audience's sole access to her feelings being through the biased eyes of the poet-narrator. Marie in her turn innovates upon the innovators:

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[91] Certainly, Eliduc and the other lais are populated by knights, and their exploits in battle are described. However, as Hoepffner points out, this aspect is intended to serve an ulterior motive: "toute cette activité belliqueuse d'Eliduc n'a qu'un intérêt secondaire aux yeux de Marie. Son but est ici simplement de faire briller les qualités guerrières de son héros, afin d'attirer sur lui l'attention de Guilliadon, la fille du roi. Une fois ce but atteint, la poétesse abandonne le sujet pour n'y plus revenir" (Hoepffner 97).

> Alors que la dame des troubadours est existentiellement absente de leur poésie, étant la projection immatérielle d'un amour finalement très narcissique, les dames des Lais au contraire ont une présence bien tangible. Non pas de belles abstractions, elles sont des êtres à part entière avec un cœur sensible et un corps sensuel. (Loriot-Raymer 96-97)

Our author upends the one-sided, unbalanced perspective of traditional courtly romance, showing not only the love-addled Eliduc, but also two women themselves very clearly enamoured and dealing with the situation in individual and equally involved ways.

While twelfth-century France was certainly less repressive where women's rights are concerned than many other times and places before or since, and aristocratic women did enjoy a number of privileges and powers, the feminine preeminence implied by courtly love must be taken with a grain of salt. Aside from a handful of women who wielded great influence,[92] such dominance by the weaker sex does not appear to have been reflected by the social, legal, or economic reality of the day. Neither does it mean that female literary personae are treated any more as individuals since, while the general turn toward romance may have feminized European literary texts, they were still rarely either female-authored or feminocentric. The feminine tended to be appropriated for other purposes, with women portrayed only as "symbols, aspects of philosophical and psychological problems that trouble the male world" (Ferrante qtd. in Rothschild 337).[93] Marie de France revolutionized the manner in which Western literature represents women, offering us some of the first realistically depicted female characters.

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[92] In Woman as Image in Medieval Literature from the Twelfth Century to Dante, Ferrante claims that, in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, "[t]here were an astonishing number of women … who ruled lands as regents or, although rarely, as legal heirs" (Ferrante, Woman as Image, 9). She singles out powerful, independent women of the period such as Ermengarde of Narbonne, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Marie and Blanche de Champagne, and Blanche of Castile as prime examples.

I have already noted certain distinguishing features separating the roman and Marie's lai. Hanning and Ferrante remind us that, typically, romances

> are concerned with both love and chivalry, with the proper balance between a knight's responsibility to his society, his service to others, and the fulfillment of his own desires while Marie's primary concern is with the personal needs of the knight or—and this is unique in this literature—of the lady. (Hanning and Ferrante 11)

The feudal system of medieval Europe was androcentric and rigidly hierarchical, and the vast majority of authors were writing from what is hardly a feminist point of view. Marie de France offers a novel stance while showing the way for plots to hinge on feelings rather than action or status consolidation alone:

> Her stories differ from most courtly romances of the period in that she treats of the problems of women as well as of men and is concerned

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[93] As Jacqueline Murray comments in "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," "[m]ost medieval literature was, of course, written by men for men and not just any men but an elite caste of celibate males who occupied a privileged place in the social order: the clergy" (Murray 1). There has accordingly been an unfortunate "tendency, even among medievalists, to view the Middle Ages as somehow having had a single interpretive stance, one shaped by a single ecclesiastical discourse of misogyny" (Murray 2). Nevertheless, recent scholarship has found ways to bring to light the hitherto hidden lives of women in this period and expand our understanding of the variety of literary voices that were present.

> less with their social position or responsibility and more with the inner man and woman, with their emotional needs. (Ferrante, "French Courtly Poet," 66)

Instead of merely reversing and so continuing to perpetuate gender stereotypes, therefore, Marie fundamentally challenges the established social structure and provides an alternative, more equitable way of understanding both sexes.

As one of the few medieval writers to write self-consciously from a woman's viewpoint, Marie de France can usefully be compared with the female troubadours (trobairitz) of Southern France, who wrote love lyrics from the mid-twelfth through the mid-thirteenth centuries. These women poets reject the notion of being put on a pedestal, idealized from afar, taking instead a much more realistic or even pessimistic view of male-female relations. Like the trobairitz, our author

> present[s] alternatives to the courtly model of the lady. … Marie freely inverts and interchanges the roles conventionally assigned to the lover (knight) and the beloved (lady); she depicts disappointed and self-sacrificial love from the woman's perspective and creates narrative situations where the ennobling and invigorating effects of love are seen in women. (Wilson xxi)

The first person voice of the trobairitz complains about the restricting conditions women suffer. Once again, Marie transcends her predecessors and contemporaries by using "the more narrative lai to move lyric conventions into fantasy worlds in order to explore the constrictions upon the lives of her characters" (Rosenn 235). Her heroines do not merely express opposition to the practice of fin'amors, but somehow manage to rewrite the rules. Refusing to serve only as objects of masculine desire or tools for illustrating misogynous attitudes, Marie's women instead seek and attain subjectivity. As I will demonstrate below, Guilliadun (despite her superficially submissive behaviour at the moment of her life crisis) is able to attain subjecthood through the inhabiting of a fantastic liminal space wherein she can demand more equitable treatment. As Ménard reminds us, "L'idée qu'il ne saurait y avoir de domination en amour, qu'aucun des partenaires ne doit commander à l'autre est éminemment étrangère à la doctrine courtoise. Marie paraît en avance sur son temps" (Ménard, "Marie de France et nous," 15). Guilliadun rejects the agonistic relations available via the centre/margin paradigm in favour of the more liberating, subversive possibilities of liminality. Both this young woman and Guildeluëc demand to be taken seriously as fully implicated in the love affair, individuals as much affected by and affecting the circumstances as Eliduc himself.

Similarly to the characters of Genji, Kaoru and others in the work of Murasaki Shikibu, it must be underscored that Marie's male characters are not one-sided, evil oppressors of women. Her characterization of men is sympathetic: "Marie does not parade saints and sinners before her listeners/readers" (Barban 25). However, while she acknowledges the often uncontrollable nature of love and so does not blame the man whose passions lead him astray, she resists the temptation of fully exonerating him for the pain and suffering he inflicts. Eliduc, for example, is not written to be roundly condemned—one critic even refers to him as "one of Marie's favoured personages" (Burgess, "Social Status," 71). But this self-indulgent and at times even violent representative of a male-dominated world is obviously more at fault than the innocent Guilliadun and is held accountable for his conduct. Rather than demonizing either men or women, Marie de France demonstrates the insidiousness of any system that privileges one sex over another, and reveals how institutionalized social disequilibrium establishes conditions that make it virtually impossible for relationships based on mutual trust and respect to flourish.

Like the monogatari in Murasaki Shikibu's Japan, romance literature was in Marie's day and age in great vogue among a medieval aristocracy, especially its female members. The oft-cited passage (ll. 41-45) from the Vie de seint Edmund le rei written by Denis Piramus, one of her contemporaries, provides clear evidence that the writing of "dame Marie" was popular among "counts, barons, and knights":

> Kar mult l'aiment, si l'unt mult cher
> Cunte, barun e chivaler ;
> E si en aiment mult l'escrit
> E lire le funt, si unt delit,
> E si les funt sovent retreire. (qtd. in Ménard, Les Lais, 20)[94]

More important, in my view, are the following lines, which point out how these lais please the ladies in particular, who listen "happily and willingly" to tales that are so to their liking:

> Les lais solent as dames pleire:
> De joie les oient e de gré,
> Qu'il sunt sulum lur volenté.

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[94] Mickel translates this passage as follows: "For all love it greatly and hold it dear—counts, barons, and knights. And so they love the text and have it read and take pleasure in it and cause it often to be retold" (Mickel, Marie de France, 15).

Marie's were not the only texts in this new literature to take account of the females in the audience, and recent studies have convincingly argued that a number of texts by other authors were written for or even commissioned by women.[95] As patrons, writers, or readers, therefore, "there is no question that women were a major force in the development of vernacular literatures, particularly in the courtly genres of lyric and romance" (Ferrante, Glory of Her Sex, 107) in the Norman world. Again, the resemblance in conditions for the production and reception of literature in both 12th-century Europe and Heian Japan is striking.

In an echo of Akiyama's assertion that Murasaki Shikibu lived a more intense relationship with the monogatari than did her male counterparts (discussed in the preceding chapter), French scholar Jean Larmat comments that the foregrounded, multi-dimensional female characters in the lais may well be so because "l'auteur, en tant que femme, les voit en quelque sorte de l'intérieur" (Larmat 839). The reader's first glance at Marie's heroines will reveal women blessed with beauty, wealth, and nobility, elite creatures all living within an elaborate world of curteisie. Nonetheless,

> derrière cette vision fascinante, il découvre des femmes et des jeunes filles privées de liberté, trop souvent malheureuses en amour. La courtoisie n'avait changé ni les mœurs ni les coutumes, toujours aussi cruelles et injustes pour les femmes. (Larmat 846-47)

Larmat suggests that an emphasis on how this cruelty and injustice affect women's lives is responsible for a somber undertone in the lais, and we will recall how a dark tone emerges in the Uji chapters as well. Nonetheless, what appears pessimistic to a reader accustomed to representations of the feminine coloured by a different gender bias may appear refreshingly honest and realistic to another. As Ferrante correctly notes,

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[95] Patronage was among the few sanctioned public roles for upper-class women, who were not supposed to participate directly in politics or other "masculine" pursuits. For an in-depth discussion of the importance of female patrons in the Middle Ages, and of the possibilities that role offered for furthering the political agendas of these women through an assertion of cultural authority, see McCash, The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women, pp. 1-49.

> Marie gives a balanced picture of good and evil, of women and men, but she does seem to have more concern for the problems of women, for their need to take control of their lives as we say, and for female bonding. She may even be giving messages to women that men in the audience will not notice. (Ferrante, Glory of Her Sex, 197)

I definitely read Marie de France as on certain levels writing directly to women. Her use of liminal encoding is one of the highly effective means employed to communicate her message concerning the damaging nature of rigid social dichotomies and a systemic imbalance of power.

The Other, Woman

Duality would appear to be the key motif in Eliduc, which explicitly concerns a man caught between two masters, two countries, two love interests, two types of loyalty (i.e., feudal and marital), and even two trips back and forth across the Channel. What this particular lai accomplishes implicitly, however, is to suggest the ultimate inequity and unsustainability of more fundamental dualisms, as Marie de France demonstrates how difficult it is to negotiate one's place in a world founded on gendered binaries. Caroline Bynum summarizes medieval misogyny as follows: "[m]ale and female were contrasted and asymmetrically valued as intellect/body, active/passive, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, self-control/lust, judgment/mercy, and order/disorder" (qtd. in Murray 2). Represented as Other, women were also subject to a further damaging paradigm categorizing them at one of two extremes, either good (i.e., the Virgin Mary, the Lady) or bad (i.e., Eve, the Whore). With Guilliadun, Marie destabilizes all these socially constructed categories and imagines alternatives by drawing on and subverting the often misogynistic legends of legitimate bigamy and fantasies of adultery. She challenges the hegemony of the patriarchal "two" and its underlying hierarchies, which ascribe women the weaker, secondary position, by positing the occupation of a third, liminal space. Where society's negative valuation of the feminine is reflected in literary and non-literary culture, such "striving after new forms and structures" (Turner, "Universals," 12) by this proto-feminist author should come as no surprise.

Marie's couples try but typically fail to come together. The Lais exemplify Marie's "characteristic obsession with the problems of sexuality and fidelity" (Fowles xi), problems often presented as ultimately insurmountable, and it is instructive that in only a handful (i.e., Guigemar, Milun, and Eliduc) do lovers actually manage to marry one another. In Eliduc, the culmination of Marie's exploration of male-female relationships, while the hero and Guilliadun do wed, they are able to do so only by allowing the odd, excessive number three to take precedence over the normative two. Thus the story operates powerfully to question the inevitability or desirability of a dichotomous status quo. Anne Paupert writes insightfully that:

> on peut y voir une volonté de dépasser les contradictions et les imperfections, symbolisées par le chiffre deux, de l'amour humain,

> transcendé à la fin du lai lorsque 'les trois' se retrouvent unis dans l'amour de Dieu, faisant 'mut bele fin.' (Paupert 181)

As a solution to the disequilibriated binary established by patriarchy, Marie's characters reach beyond the rigid dualities associated with male and female and the normal social contracts to which they are allowed access.

It is in an effort to reinvent herself and her choices that Guilliadun retreats to the space of potentiality made possible by straddling the limen as wife/not-wife. Triangular relationships are a major motif in medieval European literature, exemplified by the "mari aux deux femmes" theme and the fact that much of the troubadour-inspired culture of the day was based on the conceit of longing for a married woman. A hero such as Tristan or Lancelot is painfully positioned between his love and his lord (her husband), between passion and duty. In a context where marriages were contracted primarily for political or economic advantage, love becomes de facto adulterous. However, as Meg Bogin writes, even among the troubadours: "given the social pressures against, it seems likely that courtly love at least in theory, legitimated not adultery … but the fantasy of adultery" (Bogin 54). This fantasy would furthermore appear to be specifically masculine, in that unlike their male counterparts, for example, the trobairitz never indulge in the adoration of married men.

Marie de France does not idealize the bounds of wedlock, but neither does she accept adultery as the easy answer. Virtually every possible permutation of how men and women may relate is explored in this collection, as all twelve lais problematize relationships, socially sanctioned or not. In Guigemar, Equitan, Yonec, Laüstic, and

Chevrefoil, the woman involved in a love affair is already married. In Bisclavret, the wife takes a lover to help rid her of an unwanted husband. Even in those stories where adultery strictly speaking does not occur, relationships are no less complicated. In Le Fresne, a devoted couple is threatened with separation by the impending wedding of one partner, an event that actually occurs in Milun, where the lovers are then kept apart until their illegitimate son grows up and avenges his mother by killing his stepfather. In Lanval, a married queen attempts (unsuccessfully) to seduce a knight who is in love with an otherworldly fairy. In Deus Amanz, a young man tries and fails to win his paramour from her father (more than one critic has seen shades of an incestuous bond here), and in Chaitivel a vain, self-centred woman seeks to keep four rival admirers hanging for an indeterminate period.

While certain of her adulterous heroines are indeed wicked (e.g., see Bisclavret and Equitan), Marie repeatedly allows for the possibility that a woman's love for a man other than her husband can be noble and true. This is noteworthy in that for other authors, a cuckolding woman by definition represents a destructive passion only, as she betrays one man and implicates another in wrongdoing. In the lai under discussion here, Marie addresses the reverse situation and, with Eliduc, shows that a man involved in an extramarital affair is also not necessarily a villain. Of course, it is not merely adultery that is being imagined here, but the more serious crime of bigamy. Both violations of monogamy disrespect the boundaries of marriage, dismantling one of the most important binaries on which the social structure is based by substituting a non-standard "three" for the "two" approved by church and state.[96]

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[96] Bigamy's power to shock or dismay stems directly from Christianity's insistence on monogamous relationships. As Paris comments: "C'est dans un milieu où la monogamie était un devoir

Guilliadun is faced with familiar structures turned topsy-turvy upon her discovery that Eliduc is a husband-who-is-no-husband and hers is a marriage-that-is-no-marriage. Mark M. Hennelly's article on "Contrast and Liminality: Structure and Antistructure in *Jane Eyre*" usefully describes a similar case in Charlotte Brontë's work, where "the everyday values of the neophyte's [i.e., liminar's] familiarly structured world [are contrasted] with the unfamiliar antistructures of liminal versions of the *mundus inversus*" (Hennelly 92). The Jane/Mr. Rochester/Bertha Mason triangle offers a fascinating parallel to Guilliadun/Eliduc/Guildeluëc, as both women writers make extensive use of liminal imagery in depicting a heroine caught in "a state between sleeping and waking" (Brontë 312) as she awaits the flawed promise of married bliss. In her novel, Brontë builds a strong sense of doom as ever-liminal Jane eyes her impending postliminal state, becoming "apprehensive of the new sphere [she is] about to enter … —of the new life into which [she is] passing" (Brontë 306). And liminality is here as well set against problematized twosomes. In the chapter depicting events on the night before her intended nuptials, Jane goes for a walk and pauses at a pile of fallen apples to separate the "ripe from the unripe" (Brontë 303). This straightforward, "natural" binary contrasts markedly with a tree trunk she sees that has been "split down the centre" (Brontë 302), its cloven halves still joined at the base, but each hanging lifeless. A few pages later, she recounts to her fiancé how her wedding veil has mysteriously been rent in two "from top to bottom" (Brontë 312) by a nightmarish figure. Marie de France anticipates the Victorian novelist's interest in

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strict de l'homme et un droit sacré de la femme qu'on a pu imaginer une combinaison d'aventures tells qu'une femme, d'ailleurs vertueuse et aimant son mari, se départit de son droit, et qu'un mari, d'ailleurs attaché à sa femme, fût dispensé de son devoir" (Paris 127).

the potential victim of bigamy, with both treating this woman's perspective as that of someone uneasily but nonetheless stubbornly located "betwixt and between."

In all other cases of three-way relations in the lais, either the superfluous party is eventually removed for good, or the relationship falls apart completely. This final poem demonstrates great finesse: Guilliadun is spared what seems to be her predestined fate as a third wheel to either die or be cast aside, but her incorporation into the postliminal state of matrimony undermines the hegemony of the pair as the dynamics among the three main characters shift rather than disintegrate. Marie's text resists compromise similarly to how Hennelly asks us "to consider Jane as a model of 'arrested' or 'prolonged' liminality as she tries to transform and then reintegrate herself into society without sacrificing or even compromising her antistructural ideals" (Hennelly 92-93). The resurgence of the triangle at the end of Eliduc operates as a fundamental rejection of an oppressive normative structure, with Guilliadun's successful but highly idiosyncratic transition to wifedom exemplifying an innovative means for avoiding capitulation to the very binaries her story critiques.

Suggesting that Marie proposes the unusual conclusion to her tale as an alternative to dichotomous structures that had trapped Eliduc, Jacques Ribard argues that there exists a

> dualité profonde qui « emprisonne » le malheureux chevalier .... Tout ce lai est sous le signe du deux comme le précédent [i.e., Chaitivel] sous celui du quatre—avec la même signification qui ne trouvera son antidote chiffré et crypté qu'avec l'évocation finale de l'aventure de ces treis (v. 1181). (Ribard 1102)

Of course, a profound duality has in fact imprisoned not only Eliduc but the women as well, and the antidote or solution proposed is found through a third, subversive space of possibility. Doubly disadvantaged by being female and thus a typically disempowered Other, as well as being the "other woman" caught between a legally bound husband and wife, Guilliadun reimagines the prevailing paradigms via liminality, which is always "largely in the subjunctive mood. A whole world of wishes and hopes is opened up …" (Turner, "Liminality and the Performative Genres," 38).

If Guilliadun finds herself suspended in a liminal state of wife/not-wife, so too does Guildeluëc, who has been promised and deserves spousal loyalty but has in fact been forsaken. Ferrante suggests that Eliduc can be read as "a man unhappy in his professional life who looks to a younger woman to assuage his ego, and it is only the nurturing generosity of his wife that saves them all" (Ferrante, Glory, 202). Guildeluëc is intelligent enough to recognize the ineffectiveness of any direct protest to a fait accompli, and so she does what she must to preserve her dignity and self-respect, graciously stepping aside. Guildeluëc's self-sacrifice is another result of the limited choices offered by the patriarchal social structure. Bloch writes that this lai is fundamentally "about the failure of binary opposites to find a third term, to find an equation in a universe in which no one, not even Eliduc, has other than a partial perception of a world whose very absolutism renders choice the equivalent of sacrifice" (Bloch 140). The absolutism of the patriarchal universe may disadvantage women, but it can also paralyze men, even as it privileges them. Like the heroine in Chaitivel, he cannot bring himself to make a decision and risk losing everything: his dithering contrasts sharply with the active subject positions assumed by or forced upon the women, who do manage to find that third term.

A useful article by Judith Rice Rothschild, "Controlling Women in Marie de France's Lais: A New Perspective on Narrative Technique," explains how her female characters so commonly take control of a situation and/or direct others to action, with the male characters more often letting themselves be guided by the women they love. As Rothschild convincingly argues, Eliduc is at no point in the tale truly in charge of his own life, public or private. The story begins with this vassal (albeit a highly placed and hitherto trusted vassal) having been expelled from his lord's service and, as events unfold, he is directed by the two women. Marie seems to show that the feudal, patriarchal system is deficient, owing to the bonds of unequal dualism on which it is founded, and that alternatives should be explored. Both Mickel and Paupert also note how the hero yields to the women, with the latter writing:

> Eliduc surtout, partagé entre ses deux amours, s'en remet d'abord à Guilliadun, à son 'voleir' ('Ele me diraat son voleir / E jol ferai a mon poeir', 617-18) et à son 'pleisir' (v. 677), puis à la sage volonté de Guildeluec, à la fin ('Tute sa volenté fera', 1133). (Paupert 175)

Eliduc may initially appear the classic type of a hero strong and true, but "when he goes into exile, … [o]ne begins to sense that there is a weakness in him, which emerges in his relations with the girl who falls in love with him in the new land" (Ferrante, Woman as Image, 91). This fundamental weakness is evident throughout the rest of the story.

Rothschild sees Marie's women "exercis[ing] control, manipulation, direction and power, any or all of which are connected with either the forward impulsion of the narrative line or with a condition of narrative stasis" (Rothschild 337). However, she neglects to discuss what I see as Guilliadun's very subtle means of exercising control in the latter half of the lai. Rothschild describes the events in the plot as being instigated by the first lord, then Guilliadun, then Eliduc, and lastly Guildeluëc, with the young princess's own moment of dominance beginning with the flirtation and ceasing as soon as she has extracted a promise from her lover. Many romance heroines seek to make the most of this giddy period when their beauty and sexual desirability gives them the upper hand over a besotted male. In Elizabeth Inchbald's A Simple Story, for example, a young woman emphatically resists surrendering the power she feels she should enjoy during courtship, not wanting to acquiesce too soon to the loss of her autonomy that necessarily comes with marriage.[97] Guilliadun's impassioned courting may have come to a disastrous halt, but her retreat into liminal stasis operates not as abdication to Eliduc and the older woman (Guildeluëc can be read here as playing the mother-in-law role), but rather as a subtle form of agency. The swoon, an excessive performance of stereotypical passivity, is in fact a manifestation of the self-will of a character denied access to more direct, physical expressions of power, and one that effectively obstructs her exploitation by the male and by society as a whole.[98]

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[97] Miss Milner, the heroine of Part I of Inchbald's novel, clings to this brief period of command in a young woman's life and states emphatically: "As my guardian, I certainly did obey him; and I could obey him as a husband; but as a lover, I will not" (Inchbald 154). I will demonstrate in my Chapter Three how she is punished for stubbornness unbecoming to a woman.

[98] Are readers intended to take the fainting as "real" or as a ruse, a tactic specifically calculated as a means to an end? Clearly the faint is, on one level, simply the way this author has decided to resolve the problem of the encounter, but given that Guilliadun swoons and subsequently

While Rothschild does discuss manipulative gestures, these are limited to physical manipulation "involv[ing] hands, teeth and feet" (Rothschild 344), such as when Guildeluëc uncovers the body of the comatose young woman, notes her graceful arms and hands, and then places the flower in her mouth. In my view, the psychologically manipulative nature of Guilliadun's dead faint is far more interesting. Paupert comments that Marie's heroines, while subject to disempowering social forces, are adept at finding innovative means of expressing their needs and desires: "Lorsqu'elles ne peuvent parler, il arrive enfin que les femmes trouvent d'autres moyens d'expression tout aussi actifs" (Paupert 175). Guilliadun is depicted as a strong, active character when she first appears: she initiates contact with Eliduc, takes him by the hand, gives him tokens of her affection, and insists that he take her home with him. There is little reason to believe that she would suddenly abandon all autonomy and consequence halfway through the story. In actual fact, she continues to exert control over others and the events impacting her life, but (owing to the extremely dangerous situation in which she now finds herself) must express her will with immensely greater subtlety and circumscription than previously. Certainly, Eliduc's abduction of this princess is a necessary part of the plotline and the actions of Guildeluëc (i.e., reviving Guilliadun and paving the way for her wedding to Eliduc) are decisive, but these characters are primarily responding to Guilliadun's own actions and sublimated demands.

In "The Male Psyche and the Female Sacred Body in Marie de France and Christine de Pizan," Benjamin Semple underscores

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gets her own way on two important occasions in her relations with Eliduc, there is at least a suggestion of manipulation in her actions. In the following chapter, I will discuss another incidence of this conveniently "feminine" response to a dangerous situation.

> the importance of architectural spaces, constructed and owned by men, in which women are housed. … Medieval courtly literature is replete with images of women being saved from dungeons and towers. The husband's tower or castle was a literal place of imprisonment, but also a symbolic expression of the fundamental distrust in which men held women. (Semple 178)

Several of Marie's lais revolve around the common medieval motif of the mal-mariée or damsel in distress, which in Marie become far more than symbols inspiring masculine fear or fantasies of heroic rescue. Guilliadun at first apparently requires rescue. She is locked up inside her father's besieged chastel ("castle," or walled city) as the paterfamilias seeks to protect his property, namely the daughter who is his only child and heir, from a neighbour on whom he has declined to bestow her. Semple reminds us that the

> constant imprisonment of women in courtly literature suggests that the fidelity of women could only be guaranteed through surveillance and force. … By controlling the female body, medieval society took away from women the power to grant it or withhold it when necessary. (Semple 183)

As romance heroine, Guilliadun can leave her castle only with the mercenary's assistance, but Marie de France subverts the notion of woman as a feudal pawn ultimately denied a say in her own destiny. Guilliadun's behaviour from start to finish is that of someone who feels fully entitled to grant herself and her body to whomever she chooses.

The fact that the young woman is caught up in this illegitimate relationship with Eliduc can be read as a form of punishment visited upon her for venturing outside of her assigned role and space, a trajectory that begins when she immodestly and recklessly confesses her love to her father's vassal. By her actions, Guilliadun abandons not only the prescribed feminine behaviours, but also her home and country. Any woman who wanders beyond the confines allotted respectable virgins or matrons, abandoning the private for the public, is by definition suspect and marginalized. As Luce Irigaray once wrote, "Dès qu'une femme sort de la maison, on se demande, on lui demande : comment est-il possible que vous soyez femme et, en même temps, là. Et si, étant femme et aussi en public, vous avez l'audace de dire quelque chose de votre désir, c'est le scandale et la répression" (Irigaray 142). By entering proscribed space (literally and metaphorically), she apparently gives up her right to the chivalrous protection the female sex is supposed to command from men.

Medieval church leaders such as St. Jerome pronounced that a woman who goes out without proper escort (especially if her dress or demeanour can be interpreted as less than ideally demure) must expect to be insulted, if not violated. The only safe place for a woman was behind closed doors: "Sources of all kinds confirm that the house is the privileged locus for medieval women: notionally, this is where the good woman can be found, busy about her domestic duties" (Salih 125). If so, then where does this leave Guilliadun, who has fled her natal home and undertaken a dangerous sea voyage to a foreign land only to find no marital home ready to receive her? It is clear that Marie de France rejects the misogynist discourse limiting women to a confined, domestic role, and refuses to allow the young woman's relatively innocuous spatial transgression to be so severely punished. Her lai leads the reader to question the fairness of any system that would judge mere naïveté culpable and sentence the victim rather than the aggressor.

This theme of the inherent dangers of exposure is related to the peeping-tom motif discussed in my previous chapter (in its Japanese incarnation as kaimami), in that Guilliadun, by daring to act beyond the implicit confines of her role, is subject to public censure and social opprobrium. The threat may hang over the other partners in this adulterous relationship as well, but the legitimately married couple can always simply revert to the social status held prior to the breach of fidelity. For Guilliadun, the loss of status she experiences is grave—she cannot reverse events and regain her position as highly eligible princess after being so publicly exposed to view. As Sarah Salih explains in an article entitled "At home; out of the house," even a modicum of visibility can be dangerous for a woman:

> The writings of moralists and poets use the window as the paradigm of the dangerous threshold, through which unregulated contact, threatening female chastity, may occur. Scenes of women coming to grief through the symbolic penetration of looking through windows recur in medieval writing, scenes in which reader and writer observe the woman framed in her window as she simultaneously observes or is observed by the outside world. (Salih 132)

In response, Guilliadun paradoxically opts further to disclose her body to the gaze, to the unilateral scopic violation and judgement of others, but for her own ends. This woman's loss of consciousness signals not surrender but an almost brazen self-revelation functioning as a protest against the male-dominated discourse system that has proven so deceptive.

Charles-Henry Joubert teasingly plays upon the significance of the "Guil-" found in the names of the women in this tale, concluding that "Guile c'est la tromperie, la ruse" (Joubert 96).[99] Attempted bigamy is in fact an example of trickery in the form of fals'amor, suggesting lust, deception, and betrayal rather than the sincere devotion idealized by fin'amor. Although Eliduc is not charged by Marie with fals'amor, in that he is tormented by true love (inappropriate as the circumstances may be) and clearly has no desire to harm or exploit anyone, he nonetheless stands guilty of some fairly grievous misconduct toward both women, not to mention his two lords (for falsehoods told and the theft of a daughter).[100] Eliduc has breached vows of loyalty, even if he has not technically violated his contract with either master or committed adultery. Burgess and others insist on the chaste nature of the relationship he has with Guilliadun, limited to holding hands, exchanging gifts, and talking:

> The lovers avoid any actions which would be harmful to themselves or society: "Mes n'ot entree us nule folie, / Joliveté ne vileinie" (vv. 575-76). Folie can be seen as an act based on an incorrect judgement of circumstances, joliveté as one lacking in responsibility and characterized by superficiality and lack of commitment, and vileinie as

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[99] Fowles more pragmatically reminds us that the prefix "guilli" in fact means "golden" (Fowles 128).

[100] Boland is one critic who espouses an admiring view of Eliduc's self-control and ethics: "In faith he pledges to return to his wife—which he does. He freely pledges his faith to the King of Toteneis and he keeps his faith with him. When he agrees to follow whatever counsel the daughter of the king gives him, he does, indeed, return for her. He even manages to keep his faith to two wives and to two kings. There is no bargaining in Eliduc. Covenants made are complied with" (Boland 34). In fact, however, this hero absconds with the king's daughter, whom he takes under false pretences, and so when he returns to his loving wife it is with another woman in tow. I find the facts of the story difficult to reconcile with Boland's glowing, overly complimentary report.

> an ignoble act not suited to the needs of society. (Burgess, *Text and Context*, 170)

Nevertheless, Eliduc's refusal to walk away from an improper and illicit attachment or to name the truth about himself belies any claim that he has committed no form of *folie*, *jolivеté*, or *vileinie*, and I therefore read these lines as instead an example of Marie's famous irony. By accepting her tokens of love, engaging in amorous dialogue, and finally taking her surreptitiously from her father's house, Eliduc seriously compromises Guilliadun. Guilelessly assuming that she and her lover will be formally married as soon as they arrive at his home, the young woman finds instead that she, like the misused Fresne in another of Marie's *lais*, is "no wife with certain rights but a concubine without legal claims" (Freeman, "Power of Sisterhood," 258).[101]

Unlike other authors tackling the motif of "un mari aux deux femmes," Marie de France refuses to minimize the suffering of the women innocently involved in this inherently destructive triangle. Philippe Ménard insightfully comments that *Eliduc* actually comprises Marie's own variant, namely "un mari *entre* deux femmes," in that the Other/Woman here becomes a subject in her own right. The hero stands between two very real female presences, both deserving of his love and respect and both representing, according to Larmat, "l'idéal de l'auteur" (Larmat 846). The women are now full and equal players in the human comedy, rather than merely a twinned foil against which a man's struggle between a new inclination and loyalty to a prior commitment is played out. Ménard adds a reminder that we should not judge Eliduc too harshly: "cet homme de l'instant, du provisoire, de l'inachevé, des demi-mesures est notre semblable, notre frère. Comment en vouloir au sympathique Eliduc, si humain, trop humain?" (Ménard, Lais, 121). This conclusion rightly counters any reading that would unnecessarily vilify Eliduc by misreading what must be taken to be Marie's more generous and nuanced interpretation. However, the knight does share a certain unadmirable fatalism and irresolution with other heroes in the lais.[102] It is hard to deny that while in the opening scenes he appears to have been unfairly dismissed and exiled, Eliduc's "behavior through the rest of the lai suggests that he is capable of the kind of action for which he is punished, without perhaps even recognizing himself that what he does is wrong. Marie slowly reveals the defects of her hero" (Hanning and Ferrante 231).

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[101] In the "Marriage" chapter of *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, Dyan Elliot cites another critic regarding how actual cases of bigamy were handled in the Middle Ages: "the vast majority of cases of marriage litigation before the ecclesiastical courts concerned efforts to enforce a marriage that one party denied, while a large proportion of these cases involved actual bigamy. A clandestine union was thus frequently being alleged against a subsequent and public union. If the contention could be proved, the second couple had to separate—even if it was a longstanding match with a public wedding which had produced a number of children. But if there were no witnesses to the prior union, and the recalcitrant spouse refused to confess, the subsequent union was permitted to remain intact—despite the fact that the couple was not really married before God's eyes and that one of the members was most certainly living in mortal sin" (Sheehan qtd. in Elliott 43).

I would characterize this lai as a masterfully balanced representation of all three participants in a complex romantic predicament. Guildeluëc and Guilliadun are not merely passive, voiceless poles between which the hero so deserving of our sympathy finds himself caught. Refusing their apparently ineluctable fate to serve as the exploited Other, they each react in a highly individual and deliberate fashion. The heroine on whom I focus is both shy and bold, exhibiting two contradictory responses to the hero, because culturally she is not supposed to act upon her strong feelings of attraction and desire. Naively, the impulsive young Guilliadun has not yet learned to suppress her heart, and confesses all to Eliduc, who accepts her love and offers his, despite the fact that he is in no position morally or ethically to do either.

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[102] Note, coincidentally, the similarities with Kaoru, whose refusal to come down definitively on one side or another also victimizes his lover.

Guilliadun has been contrasted with the character of Dido, another literary heroine who abandons herself to an unbridled passion (Marie was almost certainly familiar with the popular Eneas composed by an anonymous Norman poet in the middle of the twelfth century). Hoepffner, for example, contrasts the sensual older woman with this inexperienced girl, in full thrall of her first love, and praises Marie for her nuanced characterization:

> Tandis que Didon s'abandonne sans frein à sa passion et se donne bientôt tout entière à son amant, nous voyons au contraire s'engage chez Guilliadon le conflit entre l'amour, qui la pousse vers l'homme, et la pudeur naturelle qui la retient. Avec quelle finesse Marie analyse-t-elle les hésitations de la jeune fille, ses alternatives de hardiesse et de timidité, d'espoir et de désespoir ! (Hoepffner 98)

Although first introduced as little more than a pawn, this sublimely confident and simultaneously hesitant young woman confounds readerly expectations. When she learns the truth about Eliduc's pre-existing wife, and thus her own superfluous, excessive presence, Guilliadun declines to submit to her othering. She does not die or withdraw meekly from the scene, renouncing an impossible passion, surrendering her lover to his lawful wife, and returning disgraced to her father's house. Instead, she insists that her needs be taken into account and subtly manipulates matters in a way that allows her to salvage—by reinventing—the relationship into which she has thrown herself body and soul. Guilliadun's embrace of the limen functions as a prime example of what Bloch calls the "individualized postures of resistance to institutionally defined dilemmas" (Bloch 13) that are central to much of Marie's writing.

Temporal Suspension as Heterotopia

Guilliadun achieves her goals by stepping outside the dichotomous constrictions of custom, and in having her do so our author challenges the very paradigms that force a woman to make this choice. Barred by their sex from taking the decisive action so common to heroes in the romance mode (such as embarking on a quest or fighting a battle), heroines are supposed to bide their time patiently until the arrival of Prince Charming. The Sleeping Beauty tale reminds us that they are frequently discovered in a perilous place to which some dark force has condemned them to suspended animation. Yet just because they are often rendered immobile by both the patriarchal assumptions of their society and the very structure of the romance (which appears to offer outlets for masculine activity alone), it does not follow that these women possess no agency. They may in fact manage to counteract the marginalization, exclusion, and dispossession they experience by appropriating the "immersion in the present [that] is characteristic of the romances" (Beer 21). Dickinson once wrote: "Two Lengths has every Day—/ Its absolute extent/ And Area superior/ By Hope or Horror lent—" (Johnson #1295). Guilliadun, unlike the passive, victimized stereotype, consciously and unilaterally opts for a condition of stasis characterized by both horror and hope to undermine the prevalent hierarchies of control.[103]

The gendered liminality that Marie de France and my other authors employ is usefully informed by Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopias—spaces of paradox, the counter-sites of cultural representation and inversion that function to expose the illusions underwriting social relations. In contradistinction to inclusive utopia, heterotopia is inverted, a site where positions, places, and actions excluded from normative society are contested. The non-place to which Guilliadun strategically retreats is intimately connected with her resistance to arbitrary power, via the representation of a type of preferred space that is "absolument autre" (Foucault, audio). As one critic of Brontë puts it, alternative "spatial and temporal zones are often thresholds to transitions and transformations as they forcefully contrast here with there and then with now" (Hennelly 93). It should be noted that Guilliadun falls into her swoon during the dangerous passage from England to France: just as Ukifune was metonymically linked with the transient spaces of river, bridge, and boat, she is associated with a vessel adrift between here and there in the midst of a life-threatening storm. Finding herself no longer belonging to the preliminal stage of unwed virgin and yet denied access to the postliminal stage of legal wife, seeing no way to live and yet unwilling to die, this heroine opts for a heterotopic temporal zone that serves to challenge social institutions and their inherent inequities.

Marie's insistence on signifiers is relevant here—Guilliadun cannot be named as either wife or not-wife, and an awareness of the illusive arbitrariness of this sign explains her preference for suspending participation in a system that wants to assign her to one of these limiting categories. In a book entitled The Feminine as Fantastic in the Conte Fantastique: Visions of the Other, Amy J. Ransom notes that liminality "relates to anomaly in that objects which exceed boundaries, refuse categorization, can not be effectively pinned down by an act of naming" (Ransom 38). The Exeter king may call her his daughter, Eliduc his fiancé, the sailor a whore; she is herself granted little say in how she is defined.[104] However, by occupying a synchronic liminal state, Guilliadun effectively refuses to be pinned down. The desperate need for alternatives leads her to locate herself temporarily outside of regularly successive time, so that her anomalous position with respect to patriarchal norms and expectations can be resolved.

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[103] The theme of temporal suspension as a uniquely female strategy for negotiating power inequities in the romance, with particular reference to Shahrazad in The Thousand and One Nights, is extensively analysed in my article entitled "A la recherche du temps suspendu."

It should be underscored that whereas Eliduc's freedom to move (i.e., to travel and seek his fortune) is what leads to the problematic love affair in the first place, it is Guilliadun's inability to move (i.e., literalized by the fainting spell) that leads to its resolution. In Becoming a Heroine: Reading about Women in Novels, Rachel Brownstein discusses female vulnerability in the context of Jean de Meun's allegorical Roman de la Rose, begun in the early 13th century and completed by the late 1270s. Brownstein explains how the existence of the rose is primarily one of watchfulness:

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[104] The terms Marie uses to describe Guilliadun emphasize her youth and disempowered position within the social hierarchy (i.e., she posses none of the autonomy a married woman or widow might enjoy). As Burgess explains: "Guilliadun is referred to as a pucele (sixteen examples), a meschine (six examples) and a dameisele (six examples, one in direct speech). Eliduc's first wife is designated as la femme (twenty-two examples) and as la dame (sixteen examples)" (Burgess, Text and Context, 112). In only one instance is Guilliadun accorded the status of a similarly prestigious title, namely in l. 25 of the prologue when she and Guildeluëc are collectively called dames and the vital importance of both is underscored.

> Her life must be passed in staring at the inside of garden walls. Eternal vigilance is her lot; if she lets herself be distracted it may be dangerous. No serious action is available to her, rooted as she is, effectively prevented from moving; the sole significant moment that so much concerns her is one over which she has no control. (Brownstein 36)

Marie's heroine refuses to accept that her options are quite so limited. Prevented from either advancing or retreating, the necessarily self-aware Guilliadun nevertheless does find a way to exercise some control over the "sole significant moment" that constitutes her critical transition. In this she resembles many of this author's female characters, who

> are on the whole never at a loss for a plan, for an idea which will help them to get what they want. They cope admirably with their fears and their hardships, with the constant necessity to conceal things from those who oppress them. (Burgess, Text and Context, 181)

No defenceless victim, Guilliadun fights back by slipping free of social constraints that threaten to propel her on to an all-too-predictable fate, but she is clever enough to mask her subversion behind a safely diffident posture.

Romance heroines typically must choose between just two fates: the utopia of marriage or the dystopia of death. Nevertheless, Elizabeth Bronfen's Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic has taught us that dying itself may sometimes be re-written as utopic, that "an aesthetically staged performance of death may … also signify a moment of control and power, given that the woman's self-disintegration also becomes an act of self-construction" (Bronfen, Over Her Dead

Body, 141). There is a significant irony where Guilliadun is concerned, however, in that for her the two quintessentially feminine destinies are fused into one.[105] By choosing to marry, this heroine also apparently chooses to cease to exist—no longer maid, she is unable to take on the role of wife already occupied by another; no longer safely recognized as virgin, she is unwilling to accept the role of whore. I argue that the virtual death we witness with Guilliadun is a clear example of a heterotopic strategy for constructing the self, one that criticizes cultural attitudes equating the feminine body solely with vulnerability and defeat. The stereotypical reaction of the powerless female who can do nothing but faint is converted into an act of subjectivity and agency. Her coma, while superficially resembling the "gesture of prostration" (Rothschild 346) that in other lais normally signals repentance, real or feigned, is for Guilliadun conversely a conscious form of protest. Far from an act of yielding submission and resignation, the temporary performance of death is rather a means of both underscoring the societal oppression of women and creatively resolving a personal crisis. Turner writes that in the productive interim that liminality offers, "the possibility exists of standing aside not only from one's own social position but from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements" (Turner, Dramas, 13-14). By means of a highly aesthetic "death," where her "corpse" remains rosy and beautiful, this liminar deftly formulates and explores alternative possibilities.

The argument has been made that "because romance shows us the ideal it is implicitly instructive as well as escapist" (Beer 9). Marie de France's lais, Eliduc in particular, clearly subvert romantic assumptions about the ideal of intimate relations between men and women.[106] While they do contain some unreal, fantastic elements, "the *lais* are mostly concerned with ordinary people coping with the problems of ordinary life, unhappy marriages, … inadequate reward for services, frustrated desires, the limitations of people and society" (Ferrante, *Glory of Her Sex*, 197). Chrétien de Troyes' contemporaneous *Cligès* may serve as a counter example of escapist romantic fantasy. In his text, we encounter a heroine who, refusing to bow to the carnal demands of men, manages to exist as both wife and virgin, woman and maid at one and the same time. The long-married Fenice boasts to her beloved Cligès, "Mes bien sai qui dame m'apele / Ne set que je soie pucele"[107] (Chrétien de Troyes ll. 5221-22). Fortuitously provided with a magic potion by her nurse, she has been able to defer consummation while tricking her despised husband, Alis (Cligès' uncle), into believing that he is enjoying his conjugal rights:

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[105] Indeed, her intended burial and her wedding are explicitly paralleled. Eliduc plans to honour his apparently dead lover "Od grant honur, od bel servise" (l. 880) and their eventual marriage is described in virtually identical terms: "A grant honur, od bel servise" (l. 1146).

> […] quant il dort,
>
> Si li sanble que son deport
>
> Ait de moi tot a sa devise

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[106] Christopher Kleinhenz's contribution to *Matrons and Marginal Women in Medieval Society* entitled "Pulzelle e Maritate: Coming of Age, Rites of Passage, and the Question of Marriage in Some Early Italian Poems," studies the persona of a young woman who longs to have a lover or a husband in terms that cannot help but remind the reader of Guilliadun upon her acquaintance with Eliduc. He comments that narrators adopting this persona "view themselves as being at that particular moment in their life when they should either have a lover or get married in order to progress to a more advanced stage, to assume a new role in society, which, if their choice is marriage, would be that of the matron. They are, so to speak, on the margin, on one side of the line that separates them from assuming the role of wife and/or lover. They have come of age and are ready either to leave their inferior position in the family, subject to parental authority, or to move beyond their celibate existence, and to embark on what appears to be a freer and more fulfilling life as an adult" (Kleinhenz 92). These Italian poems can be read ironically against Marie's more realistic depiction of the benefits of involvement in sexual politics.

[107] "Those who call me lady little know that I am still a maid."

> Ausi con s'antre mes braz gise. (ll. 5225-8)[108]

While the raison d'être of romance is to play on the notion of "an extratemporal hiatus between two biological moments—the arousal of passion, and its satisfaction" (Bakhtin 90), Chrétien's tale takes this aspect to an extreme. Fenice is never required to surrender her body to Alis, her insistence on corporeal autonomy being stated in no uncertain terms (ll. 3143-4): "Qui a le cuer, cil ait le cors; / Toz les autres an met defors."[109] I am reminded of the argument for male authorship of the Japanese Taketori Monogatari, discussed in my previous chapter. Imai's claim that a woman writer would necessarily have a greater stake in exploring a female's limited options and the real implications of marriage to a man one does not love is surely relevant here.

Marie's lais frequently touch on problems such as sexual intimidation and coersion that are of particular concern to women. Corinne Saunders, in Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England, writes of how important such implicit dangers may be: "The threat of rape in romance … and the repeated emphasis on ravishment, allows for the proof of chivalric structures – the order of the land, the knight as chivalric individual, and the need to uphold and protect women" (Saunders 317). Agreement is crucial if the knight is honourably to possess the lady and so the "threat of rape underlying … repeated actions of force or attempted force, usually of abduction or siege, is always opposed by the possibility of mutual consent" (Saunders 318). Marie's world is not an especially violent one (e.g., one wicked woman has her nose cut off in punishment and a bird is killed and thrown against the breast of another woman), but the threat of (especially sexual) violence toward the weaker party is just below the surface.[110] Both Guilliadun and Guildeluëc find themselves in the unusual position of not being safely attached to a male as a proper medieval woman should be because, in attempting to possess them both without their consent (i.e., they have not agreed to this three-way union), Eliduc's actions have in fact dispossessed them both. Bogin makes it clear that "[w]omen of all ranks, even those who held property, were wards throughout the Middles Ages, always under the official guardianship of a man" (Bogin 24). Marie describes women released from such guardianship, but this does not result in the liberation from oppression a reader might naively expect. The younger has left the protection of her father to follow a lover, only to find that he cannot offer her legitimate protection, while the elder discovers that she has been cast off by the husband who is promised to her for life. Their trust and security have been violated, suggesting that their bodies as well are at risk.

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[108] "It seems to him, while he is sleeping, that he is awake and that he is in my arms enjoying his sport."

[109] "He who has my heart will have my body, too; all others must step aside."

When the sailor speaks against Eliduc, confronts him with the truth and his lie, he is unceremoniously struck with an oar and thrown overboard. What possible motivation can there be for Guilliadun to recover immediately from her swoon and herself confront this man who has just proven himself capable of murder? She is obviously no match for him physically, and has now become aware of his betrayal in the romantic realm where she had thought to have commanded. This is a serious blow to her confidence and sense of self: "Elle avait mis toute sa confiance en Eliduc. La découverte que celui qu'elle aime est marié est pour elle un coup de poignard en plein cœur. … C'est … un choc brutal, une souffrance insupportable" (Ménard, Les Lais, 118). While ostensibly powerless in a world governed by patriarchal and misogynous values, our heroine nonetheless determines to exercise control by taking refuge in a sort of temporal sanctuary, and the more fragile player in the patriarchal power game does in fact hold her own.

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[110] With Inchbald's novel, we will see the threat of rape becoming more explicit (i.e., with Matilda's abduction by the nefarious Lord Margrave).

Guilliadun is of course not the only one of Marie's many unhappy lovers to fall into a state between sleeping and waking, life and death, but here alone is the act of fainting integral to the plot rather than merely a fleeting, incidental event.[111] For more than one critic, this still and silent female body stands for the "extrême souffrance morale" (Ménard, "Marie de France et nous," 24) that Guilliadun experiences, but I believe that it has far more profound metaphorical significance. We should bear in mind that "[t]he English word body comes from OE bodij which is neuter; the French, Italian, and German words for body … all derive from the neuter Latin corpus which in turn comes from the Greek neuter word … meaning heart" (Kamboureli 32). Thus in its insistent corporeality, the body-of-Guilliadun can be paradoxically read as located somehow between the feminine and the masculine, as etymologically occupying a third space outside that unsustainable binary.

I have already demonstrated how Marie de France undermines the male's prerogative to take charge. Mickel contrasts her heroes to the more active ones in a typical romance: "In the lais it is the adventure which comes to the hero. Far from setting forth on an adventurous quest, the hero of the Lais is essentially passive" (Mickel, Marie de France, 125). What may on the surface resemble passivity in the heroine as well is, upon closer and more careful examination, revealed as in fact a successful manipulation tactic for asserting and protecting the self. As Carolyn G. Heilbrun has pointed out, the range of opportunities available to heroines has typically been very restricted: "Within the quest plot, men might do anything: literature tells us all they have done. Within the marriage plot women might only wait to be desired, to be wed, to be forgotten" (Heilbrun 108). It is worthwhile remembering that, in the epilogue to the Fables (l. 8), Marie de France writes "il fet que fol ki sei ublie!" (Spiegel 256) or "only a fool lets herself be forgotten." Guilliadun refuses to allow the respect and status due a woman of her birth (the fact that she outranks Eliduc is made clear in the text) to be forgotten and so finds a way to foreground herself and her needs. Anyone wishing to see her (as do both Eliduc and Guildeluëc) must travel to the "seclusion site" (Turner, Forest of Symbols, 98) dedicated to her, the chapel that stands on Eliduc's estate, but constitutes a sacred place apart.

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[111] Denise McClelland has devised a helpful chart listing the occurrences of terms related to pasmer ("to faint") in the Lais. They occur in seven of the poems, most frequently in Yonec which has five instances. Eliduc comes second with three (ll. 661 and 663 when Guilliadun learns that Eliduc is to leave, and l. 853 when she learns of his marriage to Guildeluëc). Of interest is that the only other lai with more than a single occurrence of these terms is Les Deus Amanz, which has two, both of which are men (the heroine's lover and her father both pass out on separate occasions).

On one level, like Ukifune, Guilliadun responds to her life crisis by disappearing: she seemingly absents herself from among the living. By taking vows, withdrawing to the otherworldly setting of a religious community, Guildeluëc also renders herself somehow invisible or irrelevant to the social system that has betrayed them. Both the late hermit's chapel and the convent can be classed among the "tombs and wombs" (Turner, Forest of Symbols, 98-99) that, for Turner, represent the typical sites of liminality. Liminars find themselves in a state of limbo outside the social order, a state that Turner describes as being "dead to the world" (Turner, *Blazing the Trail*, 49), and that condition subsequently becomes exaggerated or literalized. Liminality allows these women, excluded from the world they have known, to be reborn into a new and more hospitable one of their own creation. Unlike Ukifune, Guilliadun enjoys the privilege of a sort of mentor to guide her through the dangerous initiation process from pre- to post-liminal states. Retreating into a self-induced coma obviously necessitates reliance on the mediation of others, and it is of no minor significance that the threshold custodian helping our heroine through her problematized transition is also female. Guildeluëc discovers and administers the magic potion that completes Guilliadun's transition from girl to married woman, as she herself transitions from married woman to nun.

The elder woman resuscitates her rival by imitating the actions of a weasel who revives its mate by placing a red flower in its mouth. Much has been made of the Christian symbolism of this well-known episode. According to Margaret M. Boland, this particular animal

> is considered the enemy of the snake in folklore and is thought to produce its young through the mouth (Ovid's *Metam*., 9, 323). Thus it was associated with life or resurrection. ... Consequently, the weasel was considered an emblem for Christ who overcame death. (Boland 141)

While scholarship may well never fully uncover "the medieval significance of swooning weasels" (Lochrie 83), Turner's work allows us to posit an alternative interpretation, whereby the weasel's use of the magical flower operates as an example of the communication of the sacra that Turner discusses in The Forest of Symbols. The sacra stands for "the arcane knowledge or 'gnosis' obtained in the liminal period" (Turner, Forest of Symbols, 102), and the fact that this symbol is here exchanged between women must not be overlooked. Guildeluëc acts to a degree as a fellow liminar or initiate, and so a form of what Turner called communitas (i.e., comradeship or fellow feeling between initiands) develops between them. Paris comments on "l'union parfaite dans laquelle vivent les deux femmes" (Paris 127), and characterizes this female relationship, along with Guildeluëc's loving renunciation of her rights, as the very "âme du récit" (Paris 127). This communitas resurfaces at the close of the story, when Guilliadun joins Guildeluëc in the convent and is welcomed as a sister.

Finding to her dismay that she, as a woman in a patriarchal society, ultimately lacks mastery over the three dimensions of the space in which she lives and moves, Guilliadun makes innovative use of the fourth dimension. Temporal liminality permits her to undermine the hegemony of androcentric binaries and points the way for "antistructural roles [to be] played out in the subjunctive mood, so that the neophyte has the freedom to invert and even subvert the structured value system …." (Hennelly 94). The social and sexual in-between-ness forced upon her by Eliduc's actions and society's restrictions have suggested the strategy of an extended faint. By choosing to retreat to a condition of stasis, Guilliadun both literalises the damage of unjust dichotomies and, in her recognition of the limen's potential for autonomy, finds a solution to her crisis. If "revolution is one function of the romance" (Beer 13), staged here is a quite idiosyncratic revolution, an act of self-assertion against the supposed inevitability of being dominated by factors beyond her control.

No Man's Griselda

Independent-minded, assertive Guilliadun initiates contact with Eliduc, secures his love, and negotiates the date of their elopement. Her innate confidence may be shaken by the revelation of her lover's deception, but why should the reader believe that this young woman suddenly loses any and all determination or ability to bring about the outcome she desires? Far more likely is that the presumed passivity of her swoon is an active strategy in disguise for ensuring that she is eventually able to marry the man she has chosen. Many critics have compared or contrasted Patient Griselda, the epitome of passivity, with Guildeluëc, but I believe that it is of even greater interest to juxtapose Geoffrey Chaucer's character with Guilliadun. Doing so helps us see how the latter so innovatively exploits what one critic has called "the confinement to silence that has been woman's dominant pattern and lot" (Sankovitch 2).

As is well known, Chaucer wrote the Clerk's Tale (related in his fourteenth-century The Canterbury Tales by the Oxford Student) based on Petrarch's Latin translation of a story from Boccaccio's Decameron. This last was in turn inspired by an old French tale, Le Parlement des Femmes, with the heroine exhibiting character traits clearly reminiscent of the biblical Job. The basic plot in all the above involves a woman who uncomplainingly suffers great trials to reap the rewards of an unshakable patience and virtue. Chaucer's beautiful Griselda is raised from her low birth by Walter, the Marquis of Saluzzo, who is forced to take a wife so that he will have an heir. Over the years, he sorely tries her submission and obedience by making it appear that he has had their children murdered and is discarding her to marry a younger, higher status woman, before revealing that it was all merely a test.

The lai entitled Le Fresne is an obvious response by Marie de France to this tradition. Cast off by her mother, who is ashamed of bearing twins (she had strongly expressed the opinion in other circumstances that multiple births are an indication of multiple sexual partners and is horrified to find herself in the same boat as the neighbouring woman she had maligned by those remarks), the heroine is raised in humble surroundings.[112] Taken up by a wealthy lord, Fresne is later again cast off so that he can marry someone of appropriate status and, rather than rebelling against her fate, this woman lovingly prepares the marriage bed for her former lover and his wife. She covers it with a gorgeously decorated piece of fabric in which she had herself been wrapped as an infant, which turns out to be the necessary proof of her own noble birth. As a direct result of her self-sacrificing actions, she is rewarded with a formal marriage to the man she loves. (The intended aristocratic bride is revealed to be her long-lost twin sister, and is immediately compensated with an equivalent match to allow for the quintessentially happy ending.)

What Nancy Bradley Warren writes about Le Fresne is instructive for my discussion of the Griselda motif in Eliduc:

> When Fresne gives up her cloth, placing it on her lover's marriage bed, she is giving up her hopes of establishing her identity. Paradoxically, it is this very act that allows Fresne to establish her social identity, for it

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[112] Like Griselda, Fresne is caught between the two recognized social classes of the medieval world (the aristocracy and the commons), and is thus a fundamentally liminal character. Marie's character, however, turns out to be well born, thus undermining confidence in the reliability of society's hierarchies.

> is the cloth her mother first recognizes so that she is finally moved to confess. (Warren 190)

Guilliadun, like both Fresne and Griselda, is called upon to witness or acknowledge her man's marriage to another woman before finally securing her own position as wife. However, it is the hitherto unspoken story of the second wife that is told, as Marie explores how the patriarchy functions to victimize all women. In this final lai, the heroine ostensibly gives up life itself, an act that eventually allows her to live and achieve what she desires. I believe that all three female characters can and should be read as "demonstrat[ing] how a woman may rise … through her archetypally acceptable behavior: by being utterly submissive and fundamentally silent" (Hansen 231).

One cross-cultural article on medieval women's writing asks, "what makes communication effective and empowering? Does silence necessarily indicate weakness?" (Roman 185), before rightly concluding that it can in fact communicate a very strong message. A posture of frailty and submission, by seemingly bowing to societal pressures, opens up possibilities that a patient and clever woman can exploit through her exaggeration of stereotypically "feminine" behaviours. Unlike Griselda, however, whose resignation many modern readers find shameful and discomfiting, Guilliadun refuses to be complicit in her own exploitation. On first impression, it may seem that she sits out the resolution of her life crisis, but it is a subversive silence that Guilliadun's virtually dead, insistently present body performs for the reader: her faint "preserves her own self [not only] by not dignifying the accusation against her fiancé with a reply, but also by sending the message that she disapproves of Eliduc's actions" (Roman 183). While many of Marie's female characters employ "verbal control or direction" (Rothschild 345) to manipulate the action, I would argue that Guilliadun does the reverse: she exerts control via a lack of words, embodying a voiceless helplessness that forces others to respond to her needs and desires. She writes her disapproval of what has occurred on the body that the patriarchal system would violate by relegating her to the despised status of mistress. She also writes a refusal to accept that her own actions were anything but the innocent expression of a youthful, independent will, certainly not wrong enough to be punishable by such a fate.

By performing "femininity," Guilliadun accomplishes three important objectives: acquiring a lover, keeping him, and placating the other person intimately involved. The first indication that she knows precisely how to use socially prescribed behaviour for her own ends is her employment of the chamberlain. This servant functions as a necessary buffer because Guilliadun is prevented by the mores of her day with making direct advances to her father's mercenary:

> Au Moyen Age une jeune fille de bonne famille devait éviter de faire une déclaration d'amour à un homme. C'eût été manquer à la réserve de son sexe et braver les convenances. L'héroïne utilise donc les services d'un messager et a recours à des présents discrètement symboliques, sa ceinture, son anneau. … L'emploi d'un messager atténue l'audace de la jeune fille. (Ménard, Les Lais, 103)

Once that contact is made, however, Guilliadun promptly takes charge, revealing herself to be fully capable of dealing directly with men, not to mention much more perceptive than those on whom she is supposed to rely. Her mediator's judgement is shown to be untrustworthy, and this not-so-naïve young woman knows enough to discount the overly optimistic suggestion that Eliduc's acceptance of her initial gifts necessarily means that he loves her (ll. 369-73).

Her essential and essentially passive act of falling into the extended swoon gives Eliduc a vital chance to prove his love and rectify the situation. It should be underscored that Guilliadun has also briefly fainted earlier in the story. When her lover announces that he is about to return home across the Channel, the heroine responds in a classically "feminine" manner that leads her lover to promise to return for her. With this short-lived swoon, she makes him agree to elope, unaware that there is anything to stand in the way of their wedded bliss, and the conflicted Eliduc does not disabuse her. As Ménard points out, "Ce rapt débouche sur une crise. Que faire de la jeune fille et de l'épouse légitime? Il eût été cruel de les mettre face à face. ... Quand il enlève la jeune fille, on découvre avec stupeur qu'il n'a rien prévue et rien préparé" (Ménard, Lais, 120-21). Thus, on one level, her fainting in the later scene, as the story reaches its climax, must serve as an almost welcome development for the hero—Guilliadun's liminal retreat at her moment of crisis postponing his. The princess releases him from immediate embarrassment, generously affording him time and space to find a solution, but he proves unable either to confess or abandon the illegitimate relationship.

As a final, not inconsiderable side effect, her death-like trance defuses a potentially hostile confrontation with the legitimate wife she is to displace. Directly owing to Guilliadun's dead faint, which forces her lover to deposit her in the chapel, the meeting between female rivals takes place in a sacred, neutral place rather than Guildeluëc's own home where the elder woman would have had the upper hand. Furthermore, it also means that Guilliadun assumes a fully submissive posture, which paradoxically grants her precedence by allowing (or, better yet, forcing) Guildeluëc to contemplate the beauty, youth, and helplessness of this second wife, and respond accordingly. By her actions, this young woman becomes a source of concern to both Eliduc and Guildeluëc. She sends the message that she cannot be cast aside by explicitly throwing herself on their mercy, underscoring how responsible others are for her welfare and future happiness, a happiness that Eliduc has seriously jeopardized by his deception. Like Griselda, Guilliadun "attains certain kinds of power by embracing powerlessness; … she is strong, in other words, because she is so perfectly weak" (Hansen 232).

As events play out, Guilliadun's problematized transition to the status of married woman is revealed as not a right but a privilege jealously guarded by the patriarchy; in other words, her stalled rite of passage underscores that she is accorded no right to this passage.[113] The temporary self-erasure signified by her coma therefore functions as a stance of resistance to the social erasure with which she is threatened, a deliberate response to the experience of being negated as an individual and denied access to the postliminal state that is her due. It is essential to note how Guilliadun successfully thwarts, through her literalization of the denigrated status of woman as nothing but the corporeal, the limitations of the body and the (profane and illegitimate) uses to which the forces of patriarchy would put it. Guilliadun is doubly absent insofar as she is comatose and socially dead, but this renders her only more present. She chooses to play a corpse in order to avoid becoming the metaphorical equivalent of one: to escape from being abandoned and ruined in a foreign land, separated from friends and family, and as good as dead to patriarchal society.[114] Burgess argues that "Marie wanted her well-born young men and women to enjoy the fruits of their excellent qualities and their hard-won social status and thus to see society rid of its brutal disregard for some basic personal freedoms" (Burgess, "Social Status," 78). A marriage arrangement such as the one arrived at between Eliduc and Guilliadun, while not completely unknown, is moderately at odds with normal arrangements and church law,[115] but succeeds for Guilliadun to secure her hard-won status where all other hope is lost.

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[113] I am indebted to Wangarĩ wa Nyatetũ-Waigwa for this wordplay, for which she in turn credits Michael Wutz (see wa Nyatetũ-Waigwa 1 and 11).

Guilliadun's femininity constitutes her crisis and her downfall, and so she employs her embodiment as a female to fight back. Certain heroines opt to

> destroy … the cultural construction of the feminine as 'dead' image ruled and violated by others in order to construct an autonomous self-image. Because culture so inextricably connects femininity with the body, and with objectification, because culture makes the feminine body such a privileged trope or stake in aesthetic and social normative

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[114] As an aside, it should be noted that the felicitous timing of Guillidaun's second faint, at the moment when the ship is about to go down in the storm, leads to Eliduc finally coming to his senses and taking command and, instead of continuing to comfort his seasick lover, bringing them all safely to shore.

[115] The legal/social basis for Marie's solution has been described as follows: "L'entrée en religion de l'épouse légitime est donc un expédient qui tire d'embarras. Il permet au héros d'épouser celle qu'il aime. Cette solution n'était peut-être pas très canonique, puisque l'Eglise, en principe, n'admettait la séparation d'un couple et l'entrée en religion d'un des conjoints que si l'autre faisait vœu de chasteté, mais elle était conforme aux usages du temps : A. Fourrier a relevé plusieurs exemples de remariage du mari dans des familles nobles, après dissolution du premier mariage et entrée de l'ancienne épouse au monastère. C'était là un moyen commode de résoudre des problèmes personnels délicats et de tourner finement le grand principe de l'indissolubilité du mariage" (Ménard, Les Lais, 146-47).

> debates, a woman can gain a subject position only by denying her body.
>
> (Bronfen, Over Her Dead Body, 143)

In an even more innovative move than that which Bronfen describes, Guilliadun does not deny her physical self—the nexus of her overpowering desire for Eliduc—but instead actually foregrounds it in order to gain that subjectivity and thus the object of her desire. Her lover is convinced that she no longer lives, even though her body (that all-important symbol of her worth) remains beautiful. The outcome justifies her chosen strategy—Guilliadun does not have to die, to eradicate her corporeal self in order to prove her point and achieve her ends. Because Guilliadun's status in life is so tenuous, she forces others to acknowledge her by this virtual death, wherein she is paradoxically more alive to those around her and thus her needs are given the attention they would not otherwise receive. Guilliadun's swoon literalizes "the position of the void, of silence, of a lack of fixed place" (Bronfen, Dead Body, 433) that femininity represents and subverts it.[116] In a similar way, Griselda performs the death of her own will and emotions, obeying her husband and lord even under the most trying conditions and is rewarded with everything she could desire.

Gisele Loriot-Raymer has neatly and accurately summed up how Marie de France is able to undermine the limited role allotted to heroines within the romance, namely as the objects of masculine desire: “Cœur et corps, la femme des Lais est aussi cerveau qui choisit et décide” (Loriot-Raymer 97). From the very outset of the story, Guilliadun knows what she wants and resolutely pursues it. Her apparent passivity is belied by the active part she plays in the plot and the circumstances determining her future, as Marie de France writes both the first and second wives as independent, decisive women who unilaterally make (courageous) choices about the direction their lives will take. There is no question that Marie admires and expects her reader to admire Guildeluëc, but the more selfish Guilliadun is also written deliberately to attract our interest and admiration. Unlike Eliduc’s selfless first wife, this young woman refuses to take the path of making things easier for others. There is a delicious passage in Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse, where Lily Briscoe wonders what would happen if she for once declined to follow the code of behaviour that demands women perform a lubricating function in interpersonal relations. As an experiment, she deliberately does not offer the awkward young Mr. Tansley the chance to “assert himself,” and instead just “[sits] there smiling” (Woolf, Lighthouse, 91). While Lily does eventually come to the rescue of the socially inept male (and their mildly frazzled hostess), smoothing over their potentially uncomfortable exchanges, Guilliadun refuses to provide the expected female response, paradoxically through performance of femininity. This passive-aggressive strategy allows her to navigate her way through social minefields with more serious implications, where her very survival is predicated on constant vigilance and the careful manipulation of others.

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[116] Freeman intriguingly suggests that Marie's use throughout her lais of Celtic (Breton) material over Roman or French may reflect a deliberate attempt to feminize the literature of the Saxon or Norman oppressors, in that she employs settings, plots, and characters that do not belong to the dominant patriarchal lineage. As another critic explains: "Like the Celtic voice, the female voice refuses repression and speaks. For Marie de France, the Breton territory of her own making is not one of oppression, it is a free zone, where neither Saxon not Norman has ever trodden, in other words, a wild, uncultivated zone" (Sankovitch 21). A wild, free zone located outside patriarchal civilization is signaled by the existence of "marginal or excluded creatures—lepers, beggars, madmen, hermits—dwelling on the edges of or well outside an increasingly structured social order" (Sankovitch 24). Liminars are no longer part of the social fabric in any way—excluded from even the marginality of belonging to a class that, while disenfranchised, retains a culturally-defined identity.

With those bold lines found at the start of her collection, "Oëz, seignurs, ke dit Marie," in which she names herself and commands attention, "Marie identifies her audience as a group of men with power and status" (Burgess, Text and Context, 74). Despite her confident imperative verb, this woman writer is smart enough to recognise that criticizing the status quo is a dangerous enterprise.[117] Nonetheless, she does not shy away from delivering a message, and to the most influential ranks at that. Ferrante comments that, compared with the sphere of men, that of women "is more limited, their tools more subtle. Outwardly many accept the role society expects them to play, that of the quiet figure with no public voice, but secretly they subvert it often to serious effect" (Ferrante, "Public Postures," 213). Marie dedicates her work to the most powerful man in her world, the king himself, boldly positioning herself to educate, to inform, to critique at the highest levels. Semple draws attention to the fact that the use of escience in l. 1 clearly

> announces her intention to convey a teaching to her audience.... The word "knowledge" in the first line is meant to catch our attention: Marie predicates of herself, a woman, attributes normally associated with men. Even more surprising, when we consider the content of the Lays, is the allusion to a moral imperative that drives the writer to reveal what she knows because it can contribute to the public good.... (Semple 172-73)

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[117] As Burgess points out, both "kingship and lordship are clearly fundamental preoccupations of the Lais. Only the substantive dame (177 examples) is used more frequently in the poems than reis (146 examples) and sire/seignur (143 examples)" (Burgess, Text and Context, 74).

Accordingly, our author gives her young and inexperienced, but nonetheless determined and resourceful, heroine the ability to craft her own destiny and point the way to the public good of greater equality.

The "art of twelfth-century literature lies in the creative retelling of what is often already well-known" (Clifford 13), and our author skillfully adopts and adapts traditional Breton songs as well as legends of legitimate bigamy and the calumniated wife. Each female character in the lais functions as "a deflector of destiny in her own individual way. She is … an active force, a primum mobile who alters the course of destiny for her sons and lovers" (Barban 26). I would add that Guilliadun alters that destiny for herself above all by strategically retreating to liminality, a third space and time located outside harmful binaries. To the degree that Guilliadun is able to take her fate in her own hands, she rewrites it, "deflecting" the less advantageous fate that would appear all but inevitable. Bloch calls Marie de France "both a disrupter of prevailing cultural values and a founder of new ones" (Bloch 19), and Eliduc provides ample evidence to support his claim.

* * *

Marie de France frequently emphasizes the truth of what she has to tell, and in many ways it is specifically a woman's truth. Loriot-Raymer closes her insightful essay as follows:

> Écriture féministe? Le terme ferait sans doute figure d'anachronisme avant Christine de Pisan. Par ailleurs, les Lais prônent plutôt un équilibre entre les principes du masculin et du féminin. Plus justement,

> le texte des Lais fait signe d'une sensibilité poétique que repense la fin'amors en y intégrant la dimension du féminin. (Loriot-Raymer 99)

"Rethinking" the prevalent discourse and the gender roles enforced by her society and its literary tradition and balancing this with a feminine perspective is precisely what Marie de France does in Eliduc. This chapter has argued that one of the important means employed in this lai to accomplish that objective is the image of liminality. A female character finds herself betwixt and between and, rather than accepting a disenfranchised, marginal role, effectively and innovatively turns the position of weakness that is offered to women such as her into one of strength.

Marie's sophisticated lais "ne peuvent être lus à un seul niveau mais se prêtent à la glose et à l'exploration rêveuse" (Joubert 73). By juxtaposing Eliduc with my earlier discussion of the Genji in terms of how the female characters embrace the limen as a means for resolving a grave and potentially fatal conundrum, I hope to have explored a new level of the complex richness that is Eliduc. The next chapter of this dissertation will continue my analysis of the use of liminality in women-authored romance. A (dis)similarly liminal form of survival is seen in Elizabeth Inchbald's A Simple Story, in that, by performing submission to the tyrannical whims of a male that force her into a position of "existential liminality," Lady Matilda is able eventually to command the love and trust she deserves, and thus potentially to achieve the future she desires.

As Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski point out in Women and Power in the Middle Ages, "To ask when women have been powerful and how is to provide a new understanding of women's lives and work" (Erler and Kowaleski 13). I have demonstrated how autonomous both Guilliadun and Ukifune can be even as they retreat to an ostensibly passive position. A romance heroine obviously cannot employ brute force or intimidation and does not have access to public authority, all of which are marked masculine. The informal influence she can exert via "a conventional posture unthreatening in the extreme as a deliberately chosen means to power" (Erler and Kowaleski 9) is nonetheless significant. On one level, we see an abdication of power. On another level, however, the heroine's actions constitute an acknowledgement that the hero will not rescue her—he is in fact the very reason this damsel is in distress in the first place—and that she must therefore contrive a way to rescue herself from, inter alia, the marriage plot itself.

To Be and Not To Be: Lady Matilda in A Simple Story

Nous ne nous laisserons
ni encadrer ni assujettir,
nous sommes ailleurs.
- Des femmes, *le quotidien
des femmes* [118]

Stopped Short at the Door

Elizabeth Inchbald's A Simple Story (1791), a fascinating bi-generational study of power struggles between the sexes, has been called "the most elegant English fiction of [its] century" (Castle 290), crafted with an "exquisite extremism" (Castle 291). My reading here focuses on what I view as one vital aspect of this extreme elegance: the problematizing of a woman's intimate relationship with boundary lines both real and metaphorical, both externally and self-imposed. This third chapter will examine how and why Inchbald joins the two other women authors discussed previously in pairing the images of a bounded body and an embodied boundary to undermine the overly simplistic and deeply flawed centre/margin paradigm. Lady Matilda, the second of this novel's two heroines, exists as a "betwixt-and-between" figure, one whose story powerfully explores the implications of a liminal femininity and its quest for subjectivity and agency. Through a female character who simply does not fit—who throughout her story is required somehow simultaneously to be and not to be—this late eighteenth-century text implicitly challenges gendered social practices based on a damaging imbalance of power.

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[118] Qtd. in Clément 13.

By analyzing examples drawn from disparate literatures and sociohistorical contexts, but that all deal with male-female relationships from a woman's point of view, my intent is (as explained in the Introduction) to help elucidate what makes women's lives strikingly "like-but-unlike" (Damrosch 12). Focussing on the liminality motif as a hitherto unexplored aspect of women's fiction within the world literature corpus allows us to do just that. In the Genji Monogatari, we have seen how the Eighth Prince's shameful refusal to acknowledge Ukifune as his daughter dooms her to an insecure social existence as neither noble nor commoner, and thereby to exploitation by other men. Similarly, through his faithless actions, Eliduc sentences the all too trusting Guilliadun to an indeterminate status of wife/not-wife, with almost fatal consequences. In A Simple Story, the in-between motif is again employed to represent and protest the disempowered female condition under patriarchy. The discussion that follows will demonstrate how Inchbald, by having the "hero" shelter his daughter within his house only under the most humiliatingly ambiguous conditions, sheds light on what happens to a woman who fundamentally does not have a place in the prevailing paradigm. Like the preceding heroines in this dissertation, this one (belonging to a female gothic tradition) serves to challenge the hierarchical practices of a society that denies women the ability to shape their own lives.

Female confinement is a staple theme in late eighteenth-century English prose, one that "can be seen simply as a convention of the sentimental and the Gothic novel, but [that in fact] works to politicize women's socio-economic and psychic plight" (Ty, Empowering, 13). This author, like Murasaki Shikibu and Marie de France before her, is wrestling with questions of the social, economic, and psychological oppression of women and attempting to find alternatives to an unfairly dichotomous world. All three writers accomplish something quite revolutionary with similar tropes by describing a specifically liminal dilemma and then revealing the limen's paradoxical potential for self-expression and even liberation from a situation that is exposed as unsustainable.

Owing to the infidelity and subsequent self-exile of her mother (the former Miss Milner, whose own fascinating story of confrontation with gendered boundaries is narrated in Part I), Matilda has been raised apart from her father, the authoritarian Lord Elmwood (formerly Mr. Dorriforth). During a childhood hidden away in a "solitary habitation" located "by the side of a dreary heath" (Inchbald 199) along the Scottish border, she might as well not have existed at all. Left suddenly motherless as an adolescent, she is grudgingly accorded shelter in the paternal home on condition that she is not seen to be living there and that her presence is never even alluded to by anyone in the household. It is made clear that any violation, whether intentional or not, of the father's extraordinarily repressive rules for her (non-)existence will result in the complete withdrawal of even this negligible degree of protection. She therefore becomes a fantastic, haunting figure hovering painfully in a place that socially speaking is no place, judged guilty and taboo solely by virtue of her femininity. Inhabiting an isolated suite of inner rooms, allowed only sporadic and mediated access to the public, masculine-controlled sphere (symbolized by her father's estate), she must pretend not to exist and, remarkably, does so with great success for most of the story. Of course, just as in the case of Ukifune, this performance of absence merely highlights her problematic presence and the injustice perpetuated by the gendered spatial practices of her society.

Turner's exploration of the ritual and extra-ritual uses of liminality continues to provide the framework for my discussion of how gender, power, and subjecthood are intimately linked to real and figurative thresholds. As explained earlier, anthropologists have characterized the concept as a life-crisis phase that, while serving primarily to reinforce the normative societal structure, nonetheless threatens disruption of that structure by revealing alternate possibilities. Matilda's virtual incarceration in her father's house is both physical and psychological or social, functioning as the rite of passage that should logically lead to her re-incorporation into patriarchal society as a safely married woman. The apartments allotted the problematized female in Elmwood Castle are undeniably liminal, namely: a "milieu detached from mundane life and characterized by the presence of ambiguous ideas, … ordeals, humiliations, esoteric and paradoxical instructions, [and] anonymity" (Turner, "Universals of Performance," 11). That Matilda is to reside with her father, but invisibly and inaudibly so, is certainly paradoxical and humiliating, an ordeal to which she must submit while trying to find or create a place for herself. The liminality motif clearly provides a subversive, feminist subtext in Part II of A Simple Story, and thus this chapter adds yet another angle to my exploration of this coded form of social protest in a broad-ranging selection of women-authored fiction.

The discussion that follows will reveal how yet another woman author has chosen to exploit liminal images in a bid to allow for "the possibility … of standing aside not only from one's own social position but from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements" (Turner, Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors, 13-14). Denied access to the social and familial positions that should rightfully be hers, Matilda has been literally displaced, excluded from an androcentric imagining of space and society. What is of specific interest here, meaningfully linking this heroine's story to the two previously discussed, is the fact that the patriarchy's oppressive actions have the wholly unintended effect of liberating this intelligent young woman from the gender roles that would otherwise disempower and victimize her. For example, this incarceration in practice reduces her chances of actually finding or being found by a potential husband, and thus of ever being normatively incorporated into patriarchal society. I will argue that while Matilda's liminality is initially imposed by her father, her ready acquiescence to the fundamentally unstable arrangement he ordains (as will be discussed below, it is important to remember that the plan is originally suggested by her mother) reveals an awareness of its subversive potential for herself. Living on the liminal edge presents numerous dangers, in that she is constantly at risk of displeasing her father by an accidental misstep and is actually kidnapped by a villain who desires her for his mistress, but this intelligent young woman finds ways to exploit the situation to her benefit. Sentenced to be neither here nor there, neither present nor absent, this character urges readers to consider what happens to a woman who cannot or will not fit the predominant model, and consequently to question how, why, and by whom those "natural" social arrangements are structured and policed.

Matilda's recognition of the boundaries imposed on her sex is profoundly informed by her mother's own failed experiment at breaching them, which helps to explain the extreme circumspection with which she acts. At the close of the novel, finally offered the opportunity to assume the status befitting her birth by accepting her father's adopted heir as husband, this supremely self-aware young woman conspicuously hesitates. Her insistence, at what is stereotypically the pivotal, decisive moment for all romance heroines, on straddling the threshold between the preliminal and postliminal states made available to her functions to protest these limited options. Having earlier rejected the role of kept woman, Matilda is not so quick to accept that of legitimate wife. She is fully cognizant that a completed passage into a postliminal state governed by patriarchal values has little to offer women in terms of subjectivity, and the ending to this novel therefore rejects any such simplistic closure or happy ending.

To the alert and careful reader, this character's over-the-top expressions of filial piety and respect for the Law of the Father must call attention to her enforced dependency. While the narrator takes care to inform readers that Elmwood is "an excellent good master, a sincere friend, and a most generous patron" (Inchbald 202), his despotic actions toward family, friends, and servants strongly suggest that we are to take this description as ironic. Matilda's absolute acquiescence to the parent who is also described as "an example of implacable rigour and injustice" (Inchbald 195) proves that she recognizes the danger and indeed futility of directly challenging the hegemonies of power. In other words, her bowing to arbitrary, unfair rules actually functions as a counter-message to the superficially presented one of female abjection.

Unlike Miss Milner, who has been rightly termed a "wild and wayward heroine" (Shaffer 118), Lady Matilda is anything but. Indeed, she consistently displays the "archetypally acceptable behaviour" (Hansen 231) for females, namely an extreme submissiveness. Rather than dismissing this hyperfeminine character as too dull and passive to hold readerly interest, however, as all too many critics have done in the past, I put forward the claim that the same authorial skill that crafted the revolutionary character of the mother is evident in her daughter as well. The latter represents an alternate attempt to come to terms with the prescriptions and proscriptions of patriarchally inscribed femininity, an act of resistance to them, no less powerful for being underplayed. The fact that she steadfastly rejects open defiance as a strategy must be read as a sign of hard-earned wisdom passed down from mother to daughter. After all, Matilda has been intimate witness to the dire consequences of the previous generation's failure: Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood's rebellion has resulted only in a slow and agonizing demise and an inability to provide her daughter with any kind of secure place in the world. Her vain and spoiled mother once resisted any attempt made to tame her, but Matilda knows instinctively how to submit as well as how to render the resistance necessary for her own self-respect and even survival all but invisible. Her actions demonstrate a keen awareness that apparent compliance with even the most unreasonable masculine demands is the only possible course of action for someone in her utterly disempowered position, where invisibility and inaudibility are explicitly mandated as a condition of remaining under her father's roof. Whereas the mother risks and loses everything by her flouting of social codes, the daughter's more politic submission eventually offers at least the possibility of attaining elevated status, security, and happiness, and therefore operates as a surprisingly successful strategy.

There can be no question that this heroine is increasingly highlighted and rendered sympathetic by means of the performance of absence forced upon her, and that Elmwood's cruelty toward his guiltless daughter is starkly underscored by her ceaseless performance of virtue, obedience, and gratitude for the dregs of condescension he offers up. Matilda's trials and her choice of response clearly speak of female powerlessness under patriarchy and demonstrate the courage and mature clear thinking necessary to endure and overcome androcentric injustice. More significantly, by means of the liminal-feminine imagery, they urge the reader to question the prevailing distribution of power and its human costs.[119] Lady Elmwood's offspring is allowed to be neither here nor elsewhere, neither present nor absent, neither beloved nor disowned, neither mistress of the house nor fully dispossessed. However, no matter how silently and invisibly she hovers, her unavoidably uncanny presence inside Lord Elmwood's house gradually compromises the boundaries that he would enforce and destabilizes his perceived right to define and control the shape of her existence or even to deny her existence outright. In this way, Inchbald draws attention to the limits impacting all women's lives under a patriarchal system.

By following her father's commands to the letter, the prudent Matilda escapes not only the censure and lonely death that had befallen her mother for daring to believe she could escape the paradigm, but also a facile categorization within the feminine-marked, disempowered side of the binary. In other words, the patriarch's attempt to own and disown her at one and the same time allows the heroine to find a third way. Unlike the novel's other, stereotypically compliant female characters such as Miss Woodley or Miss Fenton, Matilda does not simply occupy the disadvantaged, passive side of a boundary line; she is forced by the imposition of vengeful and oppressive patriarchal authority—and subsequently by her own desire to survive—to straddle (to embody) the boundary itself. Having been relegated to the threshold because others have judged her not to fit the mould of "good" female, she has learned that there is no benefit to her in "fitting in" (implying the limited, disempowered nature of the categories available to women). Therefore, when finally offered the chance to take a stable (albeit by definition marginal) place within the binary-based, masculine-dominated model, she hesitates and instead remains, at least from the reader's perspective, eternally liminal.

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[119] Along these lines, Spacks makes the following useful observation: "Even when a novel tells a story of efforts toward conformity, as almost all eighteenth-century novels except Tristram Shandy do, its revelation of the efforts' costs may indicate a counter-message" (Spacks 11).

It has been usefully pointed out that narration of liminal events can transform the literary work "into a tool for interrogating and re-imagining social values and power arrangements" (Gilead 306), and this is indeed what Part II of A Simple Story accomplishes. The literalization of an inconvenient woman's tenuous existence on the threshold implicitly challenges societal order by exposing its underlying gendered binaries as harmful. Further, this challenge becomes explicit when Matilda chooses strategically to remain betwixt and between, unobtrusively but no less successfully denying others the right to define and control her in any way. What Inchbald depicts for her readers via this character is a sustained refusal to transgress that paradoxically becomes the ultimate rebellion. The verb "transgress" literally means "to step across," but it is made clear that any crossing available to Matilda (even that which is supposed to be the prime objective of the romance heroine, namely into the married state) is controlled by misogynist forces and thus incompatible with a woman's liberty and autonomy. Where males assume the right of defining the limits within which she has value, female choice is exposed as illusory, and none of the postliminal positions available is perceived as desirable. Under such circumstances, Inchbald suggests, the most effective challenge to patriarchal exploitation of the female may well be to opt to remain "stopped short at the door" (Inchbald 237).[120] Inchbald's quietly revolutionary Lady Matilda masterfully represents that which is but which is supposed not to be, and does so through her embodiment of the liminal.

Background

Elizabeth Simpson (1753-1821) was born on a prosperous farm near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, to an already numerous Catholic family. Her father died in 1761, and so she knew financial hardship growing up. One of her brothers became an actor and, despite a troublesome speech impediment, Elizabeth determined on the same path for herself, running away to London at the age of eighteen. As a beautiful young woman attempting to make her own way in the world, however, she soon found herself contending with sexual harassment from the directors and actors whom she approached seeking work on the stage. Within just two months, having sought shelter at the home of an elder sister living in the city and reconciled with her mother, she married Joseph Inchbald, an actor and family acquaintance some twenty years her senior, whose proposals she had previously rejected. It is quite possible that the acceptance of his offer of marriage at this time was at least partially motivated by other than amorous reasons, namely a desire for entrance into the professional life of her choice as well as for protection from the unwanted attentions of other men. Husband and wife worked together to develop her performance techniques and found reasonably steady work performing with touring companies, although theirs was rather a hand-to-mouth existence. Joseph died of a heart attack only seven years into the marriage, and Elizabeth was forced to carry on with her career alone.

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[120] This phrase occurs in the story at the moment when Matilda realizes that Rushbrook has entered her rooms without her permission. As he begs at the doorway to be admitted, the normally timid Miss Woodley tells him that "this intrusion is insupportable" (Inchbald 237). When he seizes her hand and continues to press his case, she withdraws further into the private apartments the two women share, only to have him follow her. The cautious reaction of Matilda's at this juncture, her hesitation to enter upon this scene of masculine insistence and intrusion, serves strongly to emphasize female vulnerability, even when chaperoned.

Although constantly surrounded by admirers, the young widow resisted any number of attempts at seduction and opportunities to remarry, a decision often interpreted as a determination to retain both her reputation and her independence. She turned seriously to writing, in the hopes that it might prove steadier and more lucrative than acting, which proved to be the case, even though she always considered her lack of formal education a drawback.[121] An early version of A Simple Story was completed in 1779, shortly after her husband's death, but was rejected by the publisher to whom it was submitted. Repeatedly soliciting advice from friends and fellow writers over a period of several years, Elizabeth extensively revised the manuscript and finally had it published in 1791, when it met with immediate and marked success.[122] (Her second and only other novel, Nature and Art, appeared in 1796.) In the meantime, Elizabeth Inchbald had established a name for herself as a prolific playwright[123]: between 1784 and 1805, nineteen of her plays were performed and published. Her works were popular and sold for significant amounts, allowing Inchbald to enjoy an independent and socially active life. Nonetheless, she lived modestly, renting undistinguished rooms and dressing without extravagance, which allowed her to help support more destitute family members (especially one sister who lived precariously as a prostitute).

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[121] The author's preface to A Simple Story makes explicit reference to the fact that she had received "an education confined to the narrow boundaries prescribed her sex" (Inchbald 1).

[122] First appearing in 1791, with its author paid £200 for the rights, A Simple Story went immediately into a second edition (see Manvell 37). Subsequent editions appeared in 1793 and 1799 (Jenkins 298).

While Murasaki Shikibu has enjoyed a constant readership over the centuries, and Marie de France has likewise found a more or less consistent place in the European canon, this woman writer virtually disappeared from England's world of letters in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As recently as 1986, in Mothers of the Novel: 100 good women authors before Jane Austen, Dale Spender lamented the "absence of Elizabeth Inchbald from the literary tradition," terming this neglect "not only a loss – [but] a disgrace" (Spender 215). Inchbald's talents were certainly very much recognized during her lifetime: as an actress, novelist, playwright, and critic (many cite her as the first Englishwoman to earn a living reviewing drama), she was highly involved with and well respected in both theatrical and literary circles, associating with such notable figures as Maria Edgeworth, William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, John Philip Kemble, Amelia Opie, and Sarah Siddons. Therefore, it is indeed difficult to see her later erasure from our literary heritage as in any way inevitable or justifiable. Fortunately, her works, including the novel under consideration here, have recently been recovered and now appear on countless reading lists and are being discussed in a broad range of scholarly books and articles.

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[123] As is frequently mentioned in the literature, it is Inchbald's adaptation of Kotzebue's Lover's Vows that Jane Austen has her Mansfield Park characters rehearse to such disruptive effect.

A Simple Story attracts interest on several levels. Inchbald belonged to the Catholic minority in a firmly Protestant England, and this novel can be read as an attempt to promote better understanding of her religion. As well, the story of Miss Milner in Part I has commonly been taken as autobiographical: as the author's sober study of her own vain, youthful self; the impact of losing her father at a tender age; and what has been assumed to be an unrequited passion for John Philip Kemble (who, like Dorriforth, had for a time studied for the priesthood). Furthermore, it is a fine piece of literature, with superbly wrought characters and situations to which readers over the centuries have responded enthusiastically. Novelist Maria Edgeworth, a contemporary of our author, numbers among those who have found A Simple Story enthrallingly realistic. As she wrote to Inchbald: "I never read any novel – I except none – I never read any novel that affected me so strongly, or that so completely possessed me with the belief in the real existence of all the people it represents" (qtd. in Manvell 159-60). Julia Kavanagh, whose English Women of Letters appeared in 1863, was of the opinion that, with the heroine of Part I at least, Inchbald had

> created a new woman, a true one, a very faulty one, introduced for the first time to the world…. There had been no Miss Milner before this one, no such graceful embodiment of woman's failings held out, not to imitation or admiration, but to a surer and deeper feeling – sympathy. (qtd. in Spender 214)

Loyal supporters of this author's fiction appear in the twentieth century as well. Lytton Strachey, in an introduction to the 1908 edition of A Simple Story, was adamant that the text stands up most favourably to others then enjoying greater popularity, such as works by Fanny Burney.[124] In the 1970s, Gary Kelly praised Elizabeth Inchbald's "critical acumen and fine literary tact" (Kelly 13), as well as her "psychological penetration[, …] sense of structure and simple mastery of technique" (Kelly 83). And I have already cited, in my introduction, Terry Castle's glowing praise of A Simple Story, which she discusses in her influential Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction (1986):

> The emotional exactitude, the subtlety of imaginative statement, make it one of the finest novels of any period. Inchbald shares the profound interiority of Jane Austen and Henry James; hers is also a world of the utmost intelligence and wit. Yet here too, paradoxically, is the same freedom—the exquisite extremism—one associates with Emily Brontë. (Castle 290-91)[125]

The first half of the two-part, four-volume A Simple Story opens with Miss Milner's dying father appointing his friend Dorriforth as guardian, in the hope that the influence of this Roman Catholic priest will counter the indifferent Protestant education she has received at fashionable boarding schools. The attractive young heiress soon takes her place as ward in Dorriforth's household, which is run by a widow and her niece (the 30-year-old Miss Woodley, who becomes the heroine's confidante). Despite everyone's fears, Miss Milner proves to possess many admirable qualities (including wit and genuine kindness), although her vanity, lack of spiritual development, and tendency toward mildly dissipated entertainments (e.g., late nights, shallow conversation, and careless expenditures) give rise to significant concern.

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[124] "Every one has heard of Fanny Burney's novels, and Evelina is still widely read. Yet it is impossible to doubt that, so far as quality alone is concerned, Evelina deserves to be ranked considerably below A Simple Story" (Strachey 127).

[125] Incidentally, I will below make a direct comparison with a work by Charlotte Brontë (rather than Emily), which could well have been inspired by the haunting figure of an unwanted, inconvenient female whose existence nonetheless demands that the male accept his responsibility for her welfare.

Sandford, an elderly priest and Dorriforth's regular visitor, disapproves vociferously of everything Miss Milner does or says, as he disapproves of all females as a rule, but this self-confident young woman refuses to suffer undeserved insult or repression silently. She challenges and teases him in return, laughing openly at his prejudices and the unreasonable attitudes he professes. To her handsome and impeccably behaved, if rather overbearing, guardian, however, the heroine remains unfailingly obedient and respectful, and we soon learn that she has fallen in love with him. Because her beloved's vocation renders the passion hopeless and even scandalous, she goes to great lengths to conceal it, even throwing herself into the company of a known rake, Lord Frederick Lawnly. Unexpectedly, the family estate and title falls to Dorriforth and, released from priestly vows, he is enjoined to marry and produce an heir. As might be predicted, the new Lord Elmwood eventually acknowledges his love for Miss Milner and they become betrothed. The course of their engagement is far from smooth: constant conflict ensues when the headstrong lady determines, as a preliminary to marriage, to test the strength of the gentleman's love and her power over him by behaving recklessly and, for his part, the gentleman determines to deny his heart if the lady proves unworthy of it by not submitting to his will. Their struggles to establish supremacy the one over the other and to find the proper course between reason and passion constitute the bulk of volume two, with much miscommunication, shedding of tears, and even a duel fought between

Elmwood and his presumed rival. Nevertheless, as Part I draws to an end, the lovers are abruptly married, with even the irascible Sandford reconciled to their union.

While the central plotline has to this point been the adversarial courtship between Miss Milner and Mr Dorriforth/Lord Elmwood, concluding with their joining in wedlock, Part Two opens with Lady Elmwood on a solitary deathbed. A hasty summary of events occurring over the narratorial hiatus of roughly a decade and a half reveals how the couple has become estranged. Lord Elmwood had eventually gone abroad on business to the West Indies, where he fell seriously ill, and she had been left for the most part without news. Frustrated and hurt by her husband's apparent indifference during what dragged out into a three-year absence, Lady Elmwood had thoughtlessly taken a lover (incidentally, the aforementioned Lawnly) and then, disgraced, fled into the isolated countryside. Upon his return, the furious Lord Elmwood had resolved to suffer nothing to remind him of his wife and her betrayal, and therefore had even sent their child, the six-year-old Matilda, after her. In fulfillment of the last, dying wish of her mother, however, the daughter is finally allowed to return home, but only under the unusual and unusually restricting conditions set forth above. Following a series of further melodramatic incidents, including Matilda's inevitable exposure to Elmwood (in which she faints into his arms), the consequent second banishing of the hapless girl, and her kidnapping by a disreputable nobleman, the novel closes with the reconciliation of father and daughter and a proposal for her hand from his adopted heir. (As will be discussed below, this young man had once himself been banished, owing to his own mother's disobedience, but through the good auspices of Miss Milner had re-entered his uncle's favour long before the Milner/Elmwood marriage, and thus was well placed to benefit from Elmwood's daughter's disinheriting.)

Much ink has been shed on the sharply disjunctive structure of this novel, which in many ways "violate[s] our notions of textual closure" (Parker 256). It is widely assumed that the second half was tacked on only many years after the first was drafted, and the result is often deemed a rather unsuccessful merger of two virtually unrelated stories. Other critics, however, suggest that the author deliberately constructed her narrative in this fashion—to be sure, two-generation novels are no rarity at this date—and that, rather than denigrating the shape it ultimately assumed, a more useful and informative course might well be to take the structure seriously and see what purpose it accomplishes.[126] Given that this juxtaposition of the relatively independent tales of successive generations is one Inchbald follows in her second novel as well,[127] there is good reason to take it as intentional.

The bipartite split in A Simple Story may even be judged highly successful in what it sets out to depict. Jo Alyson Parker, in "Complicating A Simple Story: Inchbald's Two Versions of Female Power" (1997), for example, points out that "the very disunity of the text enables Inchbald to make a unified argument about women's limited options" (Parker 267). My own reading takes up Parker's suggestion and sees the dichotomous narratorial structure as mirroring the simplistic binary model for women, who must be classified as either virgin or "whore," and the difficulty of reconciling that dichotomy. Castle finds that the plotlines for both heroines actually follow similar trajectories, and thus that Part II replays the mother's story through the daughter, finessing and adding nuance to what was told in Part I as tragedy is turned to good fortune. While not fully in agreement with all of the views of either scholar, I do concur with both in rejecting the notion that Inchbald, a conscientious and accomplished writer, was simply unable to draft a coherent story according to narrative conventions.

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[126] It is of interest that similar criticisms have been made about the last thirteen chapters of the Genji Monogatari, in which Ukifune appears. As an aside, Derrida has made it clear that the not-hanging-together of a piece of literature may well constitute its most interesting and most important aspect.

[127] Nature and Art (1796) first concerns the lives of two brothers and then moves on to deal with their sons.

The late 1700s were a fractious time in England. The country was caught up in social unrest, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and political agitation, and Inchbald's writing bears the stamp of many of these developments. A voracious reader as well as author, playwright, and critic, Inchbald took an active part in the debates of the day, including such matters as the exciting socio-political upheaval occurring across the Channel. Kelly makes a solid case that A Simple Story, incidentally described as "the most shapely of the novels of the 1790s" (Kelly 261), had "the most profound influence on the other English Jacobin novelists" (Kelly 65). Their interest in how education and other societal institutions shaped the human character could certainly find exemplary models in Inchbald's heroines.[128] These latter decades also saw the beginnings of the feminist movement in the Western world, with Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women appearing in 1792 (almost precisely one year after the appearance of A Simple Story). If, as a woman, she was obliged to "negotiate the delicate balance between what was and what was not acceptable to her readers as well as to her government" (Maurer xli, ft. 13), there is no doubt that Inchbald was interested in politics on both an international and an interpersonal scale. This particular novel offers a profound examination of the role of power and tyranny in human relationships, particularly as regards the male-female dynamic, as well as the possibilities for (and the costs of) rebellion and liberation.

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[128] Kelly states his case for her pre-eminence even more forcefully some pages later: "Elizabeth Inchbald ..., along with Robert Bage, founded the English Jacobin novel. At a time when the English popular novel was going through a period of vulgar commercial formula and low critical esteem, Holcroft and Godwin, two of the most important novelists of the 1790s, had the benefit of direct acquaintance with both Mrs. Inchbald and her novel A Simple Story" (Kelly 113).

The Desperation of Dependency

Gloria Anzaldúa writes eloquently of a certain type of liminal space: "A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. … The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (Anzaldúa 25). Unable to exist fully either within her father's world or independent of it, the always and already prohibited Matilda finds herself inhabiting very much an indeterminate space on the borderline. Loss of the mother makes tangible the daughter's social, economical, and physical vulnerability: she is clearly in desperate need of sanctuary and support. These should be forthcoming from her sole surviving parent, the biological and legal father, but his unnatural rigidity in refusing to hear or take notice of anything related to Lady Elmwood means that not even the grave predicament in which this innocent child finds herself would have swayed him to accept responsibility on his own initiative. The former Miss Milner, with intimate knowledge of this man's character, in her final moments therefore suggests a solution that would provide the daughter with some sort of paternal protection while not requiring him to acknowledge her presence. While it is a gamble, the girl obviously cannot be left to fend for herself, and so their ultimate dependence on the father's good will is something the dying mother cannot ignore.

When supplicated, Lord Elmwood does accord Matilda a place at the edge of the patriarchal circle, but only on condition that she keep strictly out of his sight and hearing, and that none in the household ever make so bold as to remind him of her existence. The effect of his decision is that Matilda is relocated out of the margin (i.e., the isolated countryside where she has been raised and educated, far from the centre of power) to a liminal position neither here nor there. The preliminal banishment she had shared with her mother has come to an end[129], and she is now awkwardly poised for eventual passage to the postliminal, given that the provisions that have been made for her accommodation are obviously not sustainable in the long term. In the opening chapter of Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century 'Women's Fiction' and Social Engagement (2000), entitled "The Novel's Gendered Space," Paula R. Backscheider insightfully claims that many 18th-century novels written by women "are filled with initiation episodes that lay bare the deep structures and power relationships within Western culture" (Backscheider 24). Matilda's enforced liminality, her experience of an extended initiation trial parentally mandated, certainly exposes the prevailing social and familial structures for the processes of victimization that they are. When Lady Elmwood humbly begs her estranged husband to grant "asylum … to the destitute offspring" (Inchbald 211), her actions make it clear that she is unable to bequeath to her daughter anything but shame and infamy, and that the father's rule is absolute. Her petitioning of this disproportionately unforgiving male is motivated by the immediate and future needs of their daughter, an act of desperation to which only her own imminent demise emboldens the mother. She even declines to call Matilda hers, as association with the female line "has undone her" (Inchbald 210), and instead asks the boon in the name of Matilda's grandfather, Elmwood's late friend. The brief letter by which this request is made serves as her last will and testament, although she is careful to insist on dying intestate ("will-less," in other words), making explicit the fact that if Matilda is ever to know any security in the world, it is going to have to come through the father.

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[129] It should be noted that humble cottages are strongly associated with an upper-class childhood, in that children were often sent to live in the home of the wetnurse.

The feminine, we have learned from Simone de Beauvoir and others, can be defined as what is excluded from the dominant culture. Matilda, however, is no longer merely marginalized, constructed as the Other to the masculine centre, a position that would have its inherent compensations in the form of stability and a clear definition of her role. She is certainly denied access to the public, masculine sphere, but neither is she allowed to take her place within the private, exclusively feminine sphere. The typical female, while definitely limited to an inferior role, is after all not rendered explicitly taboo as Matilda is. Miss Woodley, for instance, although she accompanies the daughter-who-is-no-daughter, is always at liberty to move freely about the house and interact with its owner (albeit under the painful prohibition of never mentioning the one who is uppermost in her mind). With few options available, the woman who does not fit eventually seeks to establish a form of potentiality for herself on, rather than behind or beyond, the dividing line between two mutually exclusive spheres, neither of which offers the security she requires. Although Inchbald's heroine is obliged to remain withdrawn from the public world of men, it is nonetheless made clear that the private, interior, feminized world she inhabits is not (cannot be) a fully separate sphere that would at least offer autonomy or sanctuary within its bounds. Rather, her space is revealed as not only impacted by masculine whims and demands, but actually constructed and policed by the male. It is, therefore, a betwixt-and-between space that sharply underscores her indeterminacy.

The pro forma father-child relationship that Lady Elmwood urges on her husband is a fundamentally unnatural arrangement, especially given the child's innocence and uncontestably legitimate status. That he agrees to impose the terms she suggests starkly underscores the despotism of a man who can be so unjust as to take Matilda in only to force her to endure a state of constant fear within her own father's house. Elmwood makes his conditions absolutely clear: "if, whether by design or by accident, I ever see or hear from her; that moment my compliance to her mother's supplication ceases, and I abandon her once more" (Inchbald 213). Matilda's position is one of the utmost precariousness: she must obey impossible demands or be "turned out to beggary" (Inchbald 225). Castle rightly calls Lord Elmwood's unfeeling, authoritarian behaviour "highly neurotic psychic blackmail" (Castle 323) and comments that the murderous Bluebeard—"only the most notorious popular example of the pathological controller of space" (Castle 323)—is his direct predecessor. Because of the danger the father represents (the previous woman in his life having, let us recall, in the end died for having defied him), Matilda knows that her own survival depends on treading carefully and adopting a posture of utter submission.

Despite the abnormal terms under which Matilda re-enters her father's world, she turns out to be a very desirable young woman who is eventually made an advantageous offer of marriage. Her story should thus comprise a classic female initiation ritual leading to the inevitable happy ending, but Inchbald's literalization of the social indeterminacy or liminality of the marriageable female actually subverts this process and reveals its misogynist underpinnings. Courtship is obviously "a liminal space—it is between childhood and adulthood, between dependency and responsibility, between autonomy and relationship, and invested with private and public concerns" (Backscheider 21). In Part I, we remember, Miss Milner seeks to exploit her temporary status as fiancée (i.e., as a woman beloved but not yet possessed by the male) as the one brief period during which she is able to wield a power that was denied her as underage ward and will again certainly be denied her as wife. She discovers to her chagrin that any agency or control she believed herself to possess was illusory and that there is a severe price to be paid for defying patriarchal privilege and seeking independence. The lesson to be learned by her daughter, who displays a more realistic attitude in this respect, is that the passage from girl to woman must be negotiated with caution.

Both storylines tell of challenge to masculine control, albeit that found in Part II is far less obviously subversive. Spacks, in her Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century Novels (1990), states that the typical female Gothic heroine

> has no power to make anything happen: only to keep things from happening, or to endure the pain of her experience. Her intense anxiety calls attention to the desperation of dependency. Feeling nightmare ever imminent, [she] dramatizes the predicament of the powerless. (Spacks 164)

From almost the very moment she makes an appearance, Matilda is already living the nightmare of anxious endurance. Having lost her mother and been virtually dispossessed by her tyrannical father, the pain of her experience is undeniable, but she nonetheless finds a way to hold her own. Just as the similarly disenfranchised Ukifune and Guilliadun employ superficially submissive behaviours in their respective bids to combat oppression, Inchbald's second heroine also serves powerfully as an agent of protest and subversion, if only the reader takes the trouble to decode the message.

By agreeing to the mother's request, Lord Elmwood attempts simultaneously to claim and to deny Matilda, thus setting up a drama of placement/displacement, security/insecurity, presence/absence, concealment/disclosure. She is sentenced to suffer for her mother's sins, which resulted from an unprecedentedly independent nature; the punishment is to be shut up on her father's property in an effort to indicate unambiguously her status as his property. Castle argues that Miss Milner "is never, to borrow a word from Clarissa, successfully 'enwomaned.' She escapes that symbolic emasculation Simone de Beauvoir has identified with the process of being made female in patriarchal society" (Castle 292-93). Having failed to conquer the mother's high spirits and fierce independence, Elmwood does not seek merely to "enwoman" her daughter by treating her in the same polite but dismissive way he treats Miss Woodley, for example. Rather, he locks the presumably intractable Matilda up within utterly unnatural limits, neither fully present nor fully absent, with almost fatal consequences spelled out for any disobedience.

Most criticism of A Simple Story, feminist or otherwise, concentrates on the character of Miss Milner and her intriguingly contestatory relationship with Dorriforth in Part I. Part II is generally deemed a rather disappointing sequel to the main storyline, with Matilda all too readily dismissed as a pale, uninteresting replacement for her bold and personable mother. Nevertheless, Matilda is in no way inferior to Miss Milner as a heroine: "What follows [part one] does not lack power […]. Here, certainly, [in the daughter's story] is Inchbald at her most self-consciously sublime" (Castle 321). My own reading locates the author's sublimity in her recognition that sometimes assumption of an ostensibly abject position is the only possible tactic for seeking agency. Once again I would like to reference the Griselda motif: by opting to accept even the worst degradation without complaint, a strong woman can paradoxically manage to attain a modicum of power and position herself for a better future. Like Chaucer's long-suffering Griselda (and like Guilliadun, as discussed in my Chapter Two), Matilda innovatively exploits what has been called "the confinement to silence that has been woman's dominant pattern and lot" (Sankovitch 2). She may appear to allow others to control her life crisis, but a posture of submission actually opens up possibilities for patient, clever women who learn strategically how to exaggerate "feminine" behaviours.

Chapters One and Two of this dissertation have dealt with heroines who find themselves trapped in an indeterminate, undefined social role that leaves them vulnerable in the extreme. Nonetheless, they manage to exploit their liminal standing as a means to achieve a certain amount of agency. Ukifune not only suffers from uncertainty with regard to both rank and paternity, she finds herself caught between two male rivals, reliant on their continued interest and good will. Guilliadun is forced to deal with the fact that she has abandoned a secure and privileged status as virginal daughter only to have her position as wife prove illegitimate, and that she must trust to utter strangers for a solution to her very personal crisis. With Matilda, we encounter a similar authorial strategy, whereby the heroine's liminality is ineluctably tied to her femaleness and thus to her problematic relationship with the androcentric power structure.

In the Introduction, I pointed out that my own interpretation lies somewhere between Castle's view of the second generation as a positive take on the previous and Spacks' more negative reading. Matilda is certainly placed in a desperate situation, dependent on a despotic representative of a hostile patriarchy and thus obliged to accept the terms he establishes for their relationship. This literalization of female disenfranchisement nonetheless allows her to be employed as an agent of protest against unjust misogynistic rule. Of course, as I have earlier explained, any effective protest must be subtly presented, providing a more realistic counterpoint to Miss Milner's open rebellion in the first half of the novel: her knowledge of the consequences that more obvious revolt had for the previous generation leads Matilda to seek a less fatal means of asserting her self and her will. The intelligent and intelligently written Matilda ultimately finds a way to re-imagine the ambiguous and ostensibly disempowering space to which she is assigned as one of at least qualified subjectivity.

The Feminine as Taboo

Much is made of Inchbald's theme of education, but, as Jane Spencer points out, "it is clear that education in this novel functions negatively, not adding wisdom but imposing taboos" (Spencer xv). The youth of Miss Milner lacked the humbling restraint normally impressed upon women by "A PROPER EDUCATION" (Inchbald 338), to cite the final words of the text, which the author places in emphatic upper case. This defective upbringing leads her to the erroneous belief that nothing a bright, beautiful, and wealthy individual such as herself innocently wishes to experience should be taboo or off-limits and, coupled with vanity and simple youthfulness, it emboldens Miss Milner to push much too far and much too hard. While only once does she actually slip into truly immoral behaviour (i.e., the extramarital affair that, by the standards of her day, is beyond the pale), this first heroine deliberately and despite repeated warnings from both male and female friends (not to mention harsh correction attempted by her quondam enemy, Sandford) exceeds many clearly demarcated limits. She recklessly disregards boundaries that simply cannot be defied with impunity.[130]

The indelible effect of the cautionary schooling that Matilda has conversely received—her own youth comprises virtually nothing but restraint—is that this important lesson has been deeply internalized by the time she reaches "her seventeenth year … the same age, within a year and a few months, of her mother when she became the ward of Dorriforth" (Inchbald 220). In addition to the one-on-one tutoring of the now supportive Sandford, who has taken "great pains with her education" (Inchbald 221), she has benefited from the hard-earned wisdom of other women. Matilda possesses "an excellent understanding [and] a sedateness above her years," for she was "early accustomed to the most private converse between Lady Elmwood and Miss Woodley" (Inchbald 216). Through the example and counsel of these teachers, this young woman has already developed an ingrained respect for the power that an often ruthlessly androcentric system wields and the vengeance it can wreak against those who try to rebel. She has learned better than, as one critic nicely describes it, to be caught "bar[ing her] teeth in anything other than a smile" (Hoeveler xi).

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[130] Ukifune becomes involved with two men simultaneously and Guilliadun runs away with an already married man, but both do so inadvertently. Set against their stories of accidental sexual transgression, Inchbald's first heroine is indeed revolutionary, a woman who wilfully chooses her act of adultery, even if the actions that erect between husband and wife "a barrier never to be removed" (Inchbald 197) are immediately regretted.

Matilda undergoes physical confinement, first in the humble country cottage and later in "some retired part" (Inchbald 215) of Elmwood House, but this, while significant, is not the most important tool of patriarchal discipline imposed upon Inchbald's second heroine.[131] Far more effective a control is what E. J. Clery, in Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley (2000), calls "the more intangible prison of female propriety" (Clery 1), since taboos on women's speech and self-assertion obviously restrict the ability to voice dissent. Female conduct books of the 18th century typically enjoin silence as a sign of "all the other necessary elements for female propriety: modesty, self-effacement, and tractability" (Shaffer 116)—elements that were demonstrably not part of any instruction that Miss Milner received.

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[131] The mobility that males take for granted, for example, is taboo for women: "Mobility is the defining condition of (male) bourgeois subjectivity shaping, and being shaped by, the bourgeois revolution. To be deprived of the freedom to move at will is tantamount to being buried alive, the theme that Eve Sedgwick finds at the heart of Gothic darkness. But it is more: it is to lose the signifier of masculinity" (Ellis 172).

Where women are concerned, uncontrolled speech is presumed to indicate uncontrolled sexuality, and thus must be stifled by whatever means necessary. As Julie Shaffer explains in detail in "The High Cost of Female Virtue: The Sexualization of Female Agency in Late Eighteenth-Century Texts" (1992), there is a price to pay for conformity to the rules. Through her presentation of the contrastive training provided to mother and daughter, Inchbald clearly engages with the difficult process of learning deference and moderation of one's desires and ambitions. What is more, her exploration of the societal forces that negatively mould (or try to mould) "proper" women reveals the arbitrariness of gendered behavioural taboos and inevitably raises the question of why anyone should be required to live in accordance with them.

As far as Elmwood is concerned, Matilda requires strict disciplinary rules if she is not to disrupt his life and thus destroy her own. After all, as her mother's daughter, she represents a potentially dangerous and untrustworthy female. Lord Elmwood has failed to tame and control his wife, who dared to violate the important social taboo keeping women faithful to the marriage bed and, as a direct result, he demands that his daughter never be seen, heard, or even spoken of. Both women are troped as the line that must not be crossed: under Lord Elmwood's prohibitions, they may not be named by others, even in all innocence. (For instance, the elderly gardener who, momentarily forgetting himself, dares to mention in passing the former lady of the house who had once been so kind to him is summarily dismissed for the offence, plunging his entire family into ruin.) Despite the fact that she, unlike her mother, wisely conducts herself within the prescribed (if patently unreasonable) limits set for her behaviour, Matilda remains for most of her story literally unspeakable to Elmwood and those under his power and influence: she is made to function as taboo personified. At this point, we should pause to consider that having a daughter rather than a son frustrated the objective of the dispensation releasing Dorriforth from the priesthood, which was so that he could supply the Elmwood line with an heir. Matilda's very existence as a female, therefore, represents an affront against the rule and practice of the Catholic Church as well.

Part II of A Simple Story offers a powerful critique of how patriarchal injustice assigns collective guilt to women, making them all bearers of original sin, substitutable the one for the other. Although he provides the requisite room and board and promises to "leave her a fortune after [his] death" (Inchbald 214). Matilda's father refuses further to recognize her existence. A paragon of virtue, filial piety, prudence, and moral rectitude (and born years before Lady Elmwood's fatal indiscretion), the daughter nonetheless exists for him only as a symbol of shame, a direct descendent of Eve. Our author's irony is unmistakable, in that the wicked, destructive femaleness that Elmwood so fears and shuns is, as the reader knows full well, attached here to nothing but an innocent and very well-brought-up young lady. His identification of the fully legitimate Matilda with an illicit, socially disqualifying act is manifestly unfair, which allows Inchbald to expose misogynistic classifications of woman as the profoundly harmful metaphorical prisons they are. As Anne Williams usefully points out in Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic (1995), definitions literally establish boundaries:

> From the Latin definire, "to set bounds to," the word denotes "the act of stating the precise meaning or significance"; … "the act of making clear and distinct"; "the state of being closely outlined or determined"; "a determining of outline, extents, or limits." Definitions, in short, also build walls—separating, subdividing. (Williams 12)

The wronged Matilda fantasises about demolishing the walls separating herself—her real self—from Elmwood on her own initiative, but promptly thinks better of it:

> "My father within a few rooms of me, and yet I am debarred from seeing him!—Only by walking a few paces I might be at his feet, and perhaps receive his blessing."
>
> "You make me shudder," said Miss Woodley ; "but some spirits less fearful than mine, might perhaps advise you to try the experiment."
>
> "Not for worlds," returned Matilda ; "no counsel could tempt me to such temerity …." (Inchbald 226)[132]

In a climate where "dar[ing] to break through the limits he prescribe[s]" (Inchbald 218) can have such immediate and severe consequences, our heroine knows that so bold and impulsive a self-exposure would be inherently self-destructive.

It should be noted that Matilda substitutes for her mother to not only Lord Elmwood, who punishes her for the other woman's actions, but also Mr. Rushbrook, who on the contrary idolizes Matilda for the connection. Like her, Henry Rushbrook had been made to suffer for a violation of patriarchal proscriptions (i.e., his mother had married a man of whom the Dorriforth/Elmwood family disapproved), and it was Miss Milner who rescued him from his own state of childhood exile. The ever rigid Dorriforth had refused to forgive either his sister or the orphaned son she left behind, and it was only through his fiancée's intervention that he was finally brought around to feel sympathy for the boy. With the breakdown of Dorriforth/Elmwood's relationship with his wife and daughter, Rushbrook benefits even more, in that he is now to inherit from this uncle.

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[132] Later, as she is being evicted for the last time from his home, this fantasy becomes more obviously rebellious: "What have I to fear if I disobey my father's commands once more?—he cannot use me worse.—I'll stay here till he returns—again throw myself in his way …. Who … shall prevent my flying to my father?—…This is the second time I have been commanded out of the house.—In my infant state he sent me to a mother—now I have none; and I will stay with him" (Inchbald 279). Again, however, even under these circumstances, Matilda declines to follow through with the threat.

Because she is constrained to honour her father, Matilda initially tries to redirect the anger she rightfully feels at being punished for a crime of which she is innocent, namely toward his heir: "I detest Mr Rushbrook," she cries, "with her eyes flashing indignation" (Inchbald 242). She does have good reason to resent the young man. He has—albeit through no act of his own—supplanted her, taken what rightfully belongs to Elmwood's own child. Furthermore, the professions of deep respect and love that he offers once he gains access to her rooms appear to be inspired more by his late benefactress than by Matilda herself, whom he scarcely knows. They can thus be seen to be founded on a conception of women as imminently replaceable the one for the other that is not so dissimilar to Elmwood's own. Lastly, Rushbrook is by virtue of his sex and social standing a representative of the ruling patriarchy, with all the privileges that implies. His freedom to act, speak, and move about more or less as he pleases contrasts sharply with the straitjacket of restrictions placed on Matilda. Granted, this freedom is qualified in that Rushbrook is in certain ways almost as painfully dependent on Lord Elmwood's whims as the daughter is. He suffers, for example, under the increasingly painful taboo against naming the prohibited Matilda and his desire for her. Because his guardian's favour, and the promised inheritance, can be withdrawn at any time for any reason, this feminized male must exercise caution and keep silent in that regard. With this nuanced approach, Inchbald is able to ensure that Rushbrook becomes a highly sympathetic character, so that it is by no means obvious that he will in the end be rejected as a desirable husband for her heroine.

Inchbald offers a second suitor, Viscount Margrave, who is by contrast a thorough cad. He originally plans to ask for the lovely Matilda's hand in marriage, in order not only to possess her but also presumably to establish a beneficial relationship with her father. When he realizes her socially ambiguous position, however, Margrave decides instead to abduct the helpless young woman and make her merely his mistress, with or without her consent. Being taboo thus exposes her to the depredations of others and to social devaluation that would extend even beyond that prescribed by her father. Backscheider usefully reminds us that "[w]omen's identity and class were not fixed as men's were" (Backscheider 29), because their standing was frequently held at the whim of male guardians, fathers, brothers and husbands. Obviously, blackguards and rapists could impact a woman's social standing and value very much for the worse, although Matilda does manage to fend the scoundrel off. In any event, the indeterminate non-identity to which she is sentenced by paternal fiat renders her vulnerable to other forms of naming that are demeaning and ultimately dangerous to her person. Lord Margrave feels at liberty to make Matilda into a public woman (i.e., virtually a prostitute), discussing her with his cronies in terms of extreme disrespect, something from which her family, rank, and ever dignified demeanour should in theory have offered protection.[133] What Inchbald brilliantly dissects for her readers is a situation where because the taboo'd Matilda is unnameable to/by the father, she becomes eminently nameable, or possessable, by other men. The very real threat to her honour, corporeal integrity, identity, and thus future that Margrave represents underscores the sorely vulnerable state of any woman who, socially speaking, falls between the cracks. Furthermore, female vulnerability is here directly linked to patriarchal neglect and injustice, to a refusal to treat her with the respect and consideration that she so clearly deserves.

It is of great interest that Matilda's father breaks his own taboo against acknowledging her existence when confronted with the fact of his daughter as an undeniably sexualized being, a female body that can be known by men. Elmwood decides that he cannot stand to allow a member of his family to be imprisoned, humiliated, and rendered a social non-person, even though that is precisely what he himself has done to her. When Margrave "offer[s] his services, his purse, his house," Matilda firmly "reject[s them] with contempt" (Inchbald 286). Contempt is an emotion that she is of course forbidden from expressing toward the omnipotent father, although he behaves similarly in providing all such physical comforts, but no legitimate, unambiguous social standing to go along with them. Moreover, when the self-involved Elmwood does mount a rescue mission, it is more in his own self interest than in the interests of his daughter's safety and security: the patriarch's family/possessions must be protected from usurpers if his ownership of them is to remain unquestioned.

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[133] We saw a similar case in Eliduc where the sailor attempts to name or define the helpless Guilliadun as a whore.

Sexual taboo is central to all three stories that I have discussed so far in this dissertation. While there is a whiff of suggested impropriety in the desire of an adopted son for the woman who is thus almost his sister, more intriguing is the implied threat of father-daughter incest. After all, accidentally encountering her on the stairway, Elmwood unthinkingly calls her by her mother's name and clutches her to his bosom. He is unable, or unwilling, to distinguish between the memory of his once beloved fiancée and the beautiful young woman he now sees before him. Is a justified fear that the all-powerful paterfamilias may much too easily turn licentiously on his own a significant factor in keeping Matilda obedient to her father's utterly unreasonable commands? This famous scene, in which Matilda's response (strongly reminiscent of what I have argued can be read as the self-defence strategy of Guilliadun) is to "fall motionless into his arms," crying "Save me" (Inchbald 274), surely must be read as quite strong rationalization for Matilda's preference for liminality. Why would she not rather remain on the threshold as daughter/non-daughter, woman/not woman, than risk falling victim to incest, a far more fundamental taboo violation than adultery?

Inchbald plays creatively with the interdictions surrounding female sexuality. Her message would seem to be that given the underlying imbalance of power in this society, openly sexual women are dangerous, even or perhaps especially to themselves. Matilda accordingly finds a paradoxical refuge within the prohibitions against women as sexual beings, making such prohibitions work in her favour.

Matilda clings to an asexual persona right to the very end of the story, even once she has been implicitly made eligible for marriage by her father's eventual recognition:

> The idea of love never came to her thoughts ; and she would sport with Rushbrook like the most harmless child, while he, all impassioned, could with difficulty resist telling her, what she made him suffer. (Inchbald 334)

The daughter is fully aware of how sexuality brought her mother to ruin, and so it should come as no surprise if she sees the opposite route as a means of protecting herself and her interests. Alison Conway very interestingly suggests that "Miss Milner's death appears more closely connected to the effects of marriage than to the effects of the character's flaws" (Conway 201), in other words that the social practice of wedlock may function figuratively to kill women. Accepting even the polite and ever respectful Rushbrook as a husband is perilous, given that he nonetheless belongs to the male sex that has oppressed and dispossessed Matilda, Miss Milner, and countless others.

Eleanor Ty, in her discussion of works by women writers roughly contemporaneous with Inchbald, notes a pattern that is found in A Simple Story as well: "The difficulty of living up to the expectations of the 'proper lady' is revealed as many of these works feature multi-generational heroines whose problems pertaining to proper conduct take more than one woman's life and example to resolve" (Ty, Empowering, 118). Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood bursts the bounds of her world, as a "woman who refuses to conform to social expectations" (Ty, Empowering, 163) and must flee the Garden of Eden for her sins. Her female progeny is in turn doomed to a lifetime of constriction and suffering. While some assert that the second-generation female Inchbald creates in this novel is "static and lifeless" (Ty, Empowering, 177), I would argue that Matilda is in fact stunningly subversive, but always in her own careful, ingenious way. Castle, who views A Simple Story as fundamentally concerned with "law and its violation" (Castle 294), rightly insists that both parts of the novel are "about the breaking of vows, the crossing of boundaries, the reversal of prohibitions. … The pattern of rebellion is linked to the struggle for power between men and women" (Castle 294). In my reading, Matilda's story is even more "radical in its imagining" (Spacks 197) than Miss Milner's because of the daughter's exquisitely problematized relationship with various forms of taboo violation.

As explained earlier, Elizabeth Inchbald was a highly attractive actress, independent widow, and self-taught woman of letters who frequented the most sophisticated literary circles. She declined to remarry following her husband's death and quite successfully supported herself in the very public world of writing and the theatre. At a time when most middle-class women were located firmly within the dependent, domestic sphere, she certainly pushed the envelope of what it means to be female, challenging various interdictions by existing very much betwixt and between the normative gender roles of her day.[134] This first novel clearly belongs among what Gilbert and Gubar, in their discussion of 19th century women's writing, have described as works exhibiting "a common, female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinition of self, art and society"

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[134] Godwin is cited in later years as calling her "a piquante mixture between a lady and a milkmaid" (qtd. in Manvell 108).

(Gilbert and Gubar, Madwoman, xii). With the in-between character of Matilda, our author creatively textualizes that struggle against a range of gendered taboos designed solely to confine and silence women, and does so with admirable finesse.

The Woman in the Attic

A Simple Story belongs in large part to a romance tradition typified by the works of Inchbald's contemporary Ann Radcliffe, who wrote what is known as female gothic. Gothic in general is "a type of prose fiction which was inaugurated by Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto … (1764) … and flourished through the early nineteenth century. […T]he typical story focused on the sufferings imposed on an innocent heroine by a cruel and lustful villain" (Abrams 111). Female novelists, in particular, have been drawn to its possibilities for establishing an atmosphere of brooding gloom and terror and for exploring the impact of violence, or the threat of violence, on a character's psychological state and behaviour. As I have already discussed, both parts I and II of the novel under discussion here are "pervasively organized around anxieties about boundaries (and boundary transgressions)" (Williams 16), which Williams and others identify as one of the genre's central concerns, especially as developed by writers such as Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, Charlotte Smith, and Sophia Lee. Although our author eschews the supernatural trappings of disembodied spirits, mysterious disappearances, etc. often present in the female gothic, she does problematize a woman's relationship with patriarchal control and employ a melodramatic plotline involving the immuring, kidnapping, and threatened rape of a beautiful young heroine, all of which elements are among its hallmarks.

Although that heroine may initially appear rather passive and dull, closer readings have shown her to possess agency and an intelligence that belie the stereotype. Beginning with Ellen Moers' Literary Women (1978) and Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic (1979), female-authored gothic has commonly been read as a more or less successfully coded challenge to the prevalent gender hierarchy and the values it would impose. In recent years, this fiction has proven fertile ground for feminist analysis, which highlights the heroines' responses to a repression of their sexuality and the fraught relation they have with the "private female world of the home" (Hoeveler 5). Diane Long Hoeveler, in Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Brontë to the Brontës (1998), has rightly pointed out that

> the ideology that seems to ground the female gothic novel tradition is the same one that grounds one version of white, bourgeois Western feminism, the belief that women are victimized and oppressed not simply by gender politics but by the social, economic, political, religious, and hierarchical spaces that bourgeois capitalism—and by extension the patriarchal family—has constructed to contain them. (Hoeveler xiii)[135]

The patriarchal home is revealed as anything but sanctuary to the helpless women who, at the mercy of a tyrannical father or father figure, are locked away somewhere deep within the "ancestral mansion … owned and built by men" (Gilbert and Gubar, Madwoman, xi).[136] Much criticism has emphasized the persecuted heroine's negotiation of these menacing, imprisoning spaces, suggesting that the recurrent "images of enclosure and escape" were crafted by "artists [who themselves felt] literally and physically confined" (Gilbert and Gubar xi).

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[135] For a discussion of masculinized and feminized spaces as important sites of a gothic heroine's subject-in-process in Radcliffe's The Italian (1797), see Henitiuk, "Gendered Space.".

The ever-present threat that the subordinated female element will eventually burst forth and thereby bring down the patriarchal structure that has endeavoured to keep her penned in is the metaphor on which Gilbert and Gubar base their paradigm for understanding nineteenth-century women's writing. As is well known, Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre provides the paradigmatic "madwoman in the attic": namely Rochester's first, Jamaican Creole wife, whose inconvenient existence he tries and fails to suppress. I argue that the image of a wrongfully confined woman appears as an important feminist subtext in Part II of A Simple Story as well. Although it may not be obvious at first glance—Matilda is certainly no "bad, mad, and embruted" (Brontë 320) lunatic, no "clothed hyena" (Brontë 321)—, Inchbald's second heroine can helpfully be read as a significant foremother to Bertha Mason, and Elmwood Castle as a precursor to Thornfield Hall.[137] In surprisingly similar ways, both Bertha and Matilda are constructed as there-but-not-there presences, kept out of sight but, no matter how hard the patriarch may try, never completely out of mind. If it is true that "a house makes secrets in merely being itself, for its function is to enclose spaces"

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[136] With delicious understatement, Annibel Jenkins speaks of the "very dysfunctional family situation" (Jenkins 277) in this novel.

[137] Other critics have written on the liminality motif in Jane Eyre, but none (to my knowledge) has yet explored the liminality of Bertha Mason in particular. Mark Hennelly's analysis concentrates on Jane's progress though her life crisis as a series of threshold crossings. Sarah Gilead also references Jane Eyre in her discussions of liminality in Victorian novels, but does not delve into its specific application with regard to Brontë's characters.

(Williams 44), the gothic manor house offers a quintessentially clandestine enclosure. The master of Elmwood Castle seeks to restore social order (that which was first disrupted by Miss Milner and now by her daughter's intrusion into his rigidly arranged life and beliefs) by locking up and then feigning an ignorance of Matilda, but the attempt is doomed to backfire on him. The male arrogantly seeks to negate the humanity of what he perceives as the female needlessly complicating his life, imprisoning her on his property while simultaneously denying knowledge of her very existence. As a liminal entity enclosed within an arbitrarily defined, restrictive, and concealed space, the heroine operates as an implicit critique of the inequitable system oppressing her, as well as of the falsehoods and intrigues on which it is based.

If even the home—the domestic sphere that is supposed to be a securely feminine sphere—is revealed as an implement whereby a ruthless patriarchy exercises domination, then any spatial autonomy ascribed to women is ultimately exposed as illusory. Maurice Lévy has famously proposed architecture as the essence of gothic: "le genre ... se caractérise, de façon primordiale à nos yeux, par le rôle déterminant qu'y jouent les demeures. L'imaginaire, dans ces romans, est toujours logé" (qtd. in Delamotte 6-7). Inchbald's Matilda is indeed logé, but in a very troublesome manner to both herself and others. She is forced to exist inside the Elmwood house as a sort of apparition—the living ghost of her mother—apprehensively haunting the rooms occupied by those in supposedly more legitimate possession of that space. In response to the power disequilibrium established to ensure that female sexuality and other forms of self-expression are suppressed, Matilda re-imagines her explicitly liminal, visible/invisible demeure as a space of resistance to androcentric power structures.

Her banished but not quite vanished presence calls attention to the limits of what is permitted to be socially visible. The heroine stubbornly claims her right to subjecthood, but is constrained to express it furtively, with a wary eye to those whose concerted efforts are focussed on making the awkward fact of her existence disappear. What this woman's story powerfully describes is ultimately a life-or-death struggle to carve an autonomous female space out of the hostile male space that envelops her.

Let us bear in mind that Matilda, like Bertha, is located to a certain degree beyond the reach of public law. With so few aware of her presence on the nobleman's private estate, and fewer still who would be willing to intervene on her behalf in any case, hers is a state of significant personal peril. The father's whim becomes for Inchbald's heroine ultimately the only law, revealing that the entire juridical structure ostensibly evolved to protect all British subjects has little to offer at least half of those subjects. Matilda's abduction by Margrave underscores the fundamental precariousness of her situation and the fact that patriarchal laws cannot or will not protect women, or will do so only where it is to the patriarch's own benefit. Hoeveler sees female gothic novels "functioning as a coded and veiled critique of all of those public institutions that have been erected to displace, contain, or commodify women" (Hoeveler xiii). Although her discussion does not, unfortunately, include A Simple Story, it seems obvious that this is precisely Inchbald's project as well, in that the only fault that can be ascribed to the displaced and commodified Matilda is that she is female, daughter to her mother. Ty helpfully explains that, in the absence of actual criminal behaviour such as theft or prostitution, there are a variety of interrelated reasons why men may desire to incarcerate the other sex: "to curtail women's intellectual development and knowledge, to shape and transform female sexual desires, to control women's properties or inheritance, and to break matrilineal and maternal bonds" (Ty, Empowering, 14-15). Matilda personally has done absolutely nothing wrong, and so her oppression reveals that the impulse to punish her is a purely misogynistic one. Ironically, it is Matilda's self-discipline, fostered directly by an unbreakable maternal bond and the knowledge of the danger of female sexual desire that the mother's example instilled, that helps her overcome the unjust discipline Elmwood claims the right to inflict.

Thinking back to the mise-en-abyme kaimami motif which I have argued is central to Ukifune's story in the Genji, we see a strikingly similar chain of events with Matilda. The latter is also subject to an unrelenting pattern of concealment and exposure that cannot help but impress upon her the imperative of finding some way to control her own displacements. She is first hidden (along with Lady Elmwood) throughout childhood; "seen" (i.e., brought to Lord Elmwood's attention) upon her mother's death and her own entrance into adulthood (i.e., as a sexually available woman); hidden by Elmwood within his own castle; seen (literally) by Elmwood; subsequently hidden elsewhere; and yet again exposed, this time by Margrave's kidnapping, which results in her once more being "seen" (i.e., acknowledged) by her father. The more apparently "hidden" by and from others, the more foregrounded and endangered she actually becomes. Because she is denied the ability to define her own identity and personal space, putting the lie to that ideology of separate but equal spheres, every act of concealment necessarily contains the possibility—or rather probability—of exposure: the woman is always already exposed, seen, possessed.

Each step of the ceaselessly repeated process of concealing and revealing female flesh incites rather than quells male competition for control of that body. It should be noted that, for a woman, any removal from her father's house (other than to her husband's) must not be made known, as it would raise questions about her inviolability and intactness, and indirectly the father's own respectability and honour. If she had become mistress, willingly or no, to Margrave, she would have been ruined, figuratively "dead" to members of her social class, and this devaluation would reflect badly on her entire family. Of course, Inchbald's mastery of irony is again apparent: this punishment of a living death, a social non-existence, has already been imposed by Matilda's own father. Both exposure and concealment equal vulnerability, and so Matilda (again like Ukifune) seeks on the limen a place to hide away, to be secure from further victimization.

Given that it is built on gendered privilege and exclusion, the house of the father must signify alienation for a woman, even when she is nominally sheltered within it. Matilda, like all women dependent on a less than benevolent patriarchy, can never be truly "at home," where "home" would mean a place of straightforward security and belonging: by virtue of her sex, she is existentially homeless. In her engagement with the paradigm of feminine interiority, Inchbald reveals an intuitive understanding of this fact and responds by actively employing the tactics of what has been called "gothic feminism." Hoeveler has coined this phrase to explain her belief that female gothic novelists were "constructing a series of ideologies … that would allow their female characters and by extension their female readers a fictitious mastery over what they considered an oppressive social and political system"

(Hoeveler xii). The settings that Matilda inhabits reflect patriarchal neglect and oppression of women, an attempt to annihilate, to shut up (in both senses of the phrase) the feminine.[138] In The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology (1989), Kate Ferguson Ellis writes about Sophia Lee's The Recess (1783) in terms that are fully relevant here as well: the "confining parent" does not turn the patriarchal home "into a prison temporarily but [instead] reveal[s] imprisonment to be its inevitable function" (Ellis 70) where so many wives and daughters are concerned. Nonetheless, total containment of the female is revealed as impossible, even to a virtually omnipotent lord of the manor such as Elmwood.

Despite his repeated and increasingly improbable denial of any knowledge of her existence, Matilda becomes uncannily present in Lord Elmwood's life. She seizes power by being present while simultaneously absent, turning the tables on a paradoxical situation that Elmwood himself has countenanced, even constructed. Matilda takes the literally "unheimlich" (i.e., un-homely) and makes it figuratively "unheimlich" (i.e., uncanny). The more he tries to render her invisible to himself, the more insistently she looms before him in his mind's eye. He can no longer keep her from entering his thoughts, cannot move beyond the obsessive idea of her—because her hiding is virtually out in the open, it can never be complete. Each time someone refrains from mentioning Matilda's name, from announcing her presence to Elmwood, it merely announces her presence-in-absence even more loudly.

Matilda may submit to incarceration, biding her time with almost infinite patience, but she does not surrender in a docile way. Instead, she actively constructs herself as a sovereign subject by taking ownership of her liminality and challenging the confining either-or spaces that would disadvantageously define her. Like Rochester, Elmwood pretends that he is fulfilling his obligations merely by feeding and sheltering this unwanted woman, and tries to carry on with his life as if she and her just claims on him do not have to be taken into account. To these representatives of the patriarchy, a self-assertive female is by definition monstrous, the sole purpose of whose existence seems to be to destroy their well regulated, highly privileged life. Matilda's presence does in fact act as a metaphorical infection with regard to Elmwood and his world, leaking beyond the bounds set for containment of that presence to infiltrate the foundations of the masculine owned and controlled house and the beliefs on which it is constructed. Like Bertha Mason, Matilda haunts her imperious master's interior space, traipsing unbidden through its hidden and not-so-hidden rooms, always with the possibility that she will emerge from her mandated position of invisibility.

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[138] The liminal sojourn in Elmwood Castle functions the most obviously to indicate a literally un-homely space, but the Scottish border cottage was also an inappropriate shelter for someone of Matilda's high birth.

In Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s (1995), Claudia L. Johnson comments on what she terms the "egregious affectivity" of emotional response in sentimental fiction of the late 18th century:

> In works by Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Godwin, Lewis, and Burney (to name only a few), emotions are saturated in turbulent and disfiguring excess; not simply patently disruptive emotions—such as ambition, greed, anger, lust—but ostensibly gentler ones as well—such as reverence, sorrow, even filial devotion—are always and obviously going over the top, and then some. (Johnson 1-2)

The posturing of characters in A Simple Story is frequently immoderate, and this aspect has often been considered a weakness in Inchbald's writing. However, as in melodrama, this narratorial strategy gives us "intense, excessive representations of life [that are used] to strip away the façade of manners to reveal the essential conflicts at work, leading to moments of intense and highly stylized confrontations" (Hoeveler 9). The intensity of a confrontation can take different forms. Miss Milner never learns how to moderate her passions, of course, but is Matilda so very different in terms of her insistent protestations of love and reverence for her father or her excessive posture of childish immaturity? The daughter recognizes the recklessness of openly expressing ambition, sexuality, or anger—the few times her rage or frustration erupts, for instance, it is either redirected or immediately suppressed—and so instead finds an apparently less aggressive means for bringing those underlying conflicts into the light of day, namely an over-the-top expression of "ostensibly gentle" and approved emotions.

The direct, physical encounter between Matilda and her father in the stairwell should make him see that she is a subject in her own right, but he still insists on seeing her as merely a stand-in for another. When she faints into his arms, all this male can do is clutch her to his bosom and react as if she were her mother:

> His long-restrained tears now burst forth—and seeing her relapse into the swoon again, he cried out eagerly to recall her.—Her name did not however come to his recollection—nor any name but this—'Miss Milner—Dear Miss Milner.' (Inchbald 274)

Does Matilda's swoon indicate that she is horrified into unconsciousness at this exposure and its potential consequences, or is she merely making logical use of a safely feminine response in order to circumvent those very consequences? Insofar as Elmwood, the self-centred and wilfully blind representative of a powerful and misogynist patriarchy, is concerned, Matilda is and yet is not: even when enfolded in his embrace, she is taken as her mother and thus placed in danger. To protect herself, Matilda exploits a correct, if excessive, feminine response. Likewise, when Rushbrook is tempted to make amorous overtures, she is able to disrupt his plans (and her father's) by taking refuge in an asexual and uncomprehending persona that unmarried girls are in fact supposed to display. She takes the "façade of manners" intended to control women and turns it into an intelligent strategy for confronting while seeming never to confront.

Spacks cites Frederic Karl as follows on "the essential subversiveness of the eighteenth-century novel" (Spacks 11):

> From its start, the English novel has represented an adversary culture. Although it seemed to bow to the tastes and needs of the new bourgeoisie, it also stood for new and often dangerous ideas, criticized the predominant culture, and displayed what were often subversive forms of behavior. It upset familiar assumptions, questioned realistic presuppositions, and tested out, however sparingly at times, new ideas, forbidden desires, secret wishes. (qtd. in Spacks 11)

The openly adversarial behaviour of the mother in Part I of A Simple Story was a clear expression of forbidden desires; what the daughter has learned is the need for more subtle subversion of the restrictive conditions of her existence. Matilda's occupation of the liminal in Part II demonstrates an acute recognition of the need for caution: to return to the preliminal stage of childhood (or, metaphorically speaking, ignorance) is impossible, and yet the postliminal states from which she is supposed to choose give her pause. There is indeed no real difference between taking an illicit position (i.e., as Margrave's mistress, as Elmwood's object of incestuous lust, or, eventually to follow her mother's example, as disgraced, adulterous wife) or a licit, but equally disempowered position as wife to her father's heir. Self-aware heroines must fear what Sandford in a moment of great perception describes as "the disposal of themselves … that great, that terrific disposal in marriage" (Inchbald 129) or otherwise.

None of the heroines examined in this dissertation is represented as solely a pawn of others' actions, as each of the authors firmly rejects defining femininity as capitulation. The woman in the attic as imagined by Elizabeth Inchbald is consequently not, as Spacks would have it, a figure of "female compliance," of "the typical female necessity of giving up" (Spacks 202), despite what the characterization of Matilda initially suggests. It could reasonably be argued that Brontë, some sixty years later, merely took Matilda's story the next logical step in having Bertha rise up and burn down the entire oppressive enterprise, maiming and almost killing her oppressor in the process. Inchbald, like her contemporary, fellow writer, and feminist pioneer Wollstonecraft, demonstrates "an astute awareness of the confines of women's social positions" (Conway 179), and both parts of the novel under discussion in this chapter criticise the familiar, prevailing culture by a display of highly subversive behaviour.

Castle sees Miss Milner's story as one involving the desire to transgress an external "forbidden zone" (e.g., the masquerade ball that she attends in spite of its being forbidden by her fiancé), whereas the daughter's transgression is literally closer to home:

> Unlike her mother, Matilda does not go anywhere in order to transgress—anywhere that is, outside Elmwood Castle. She seeks out no 'promiscuous' occasion, no suspect public diversion. Rather, the realm of transgression is inside: it is within the house of the father, part of domesticity itself. (Castle 325)

This critic rightly describes Inchbald's innovation in this matter as "remarkable," but I would argue that our author is actually even more innovative than credited, because the realm of transgression is in fact presented as the feminine condition itself. If both Miss Milner's and Matilda's "marriage narratives" are "insistently bizarre" (Conway 211), Inchbald makes them so in order to focus the reader's attention critically on the more typical female trajectory and the inherently damaging social structure on which it is based. Matilda refuses identification as either criminal or, despite her innate virtuousness, the "angel in the house," to borrow Virginia Woolf's coinage for the idealized image of a devoted, selfless wife and mother that the female sex is advised to emulate. Inchbald makes the implicit explicit and, as Spacks comments with regard to eighteenth-century novels in general, "[a] sometimes breathtaking sense of sexual antagonism permeates th[is] fiction[…]" (Spacks 190). If the misogynist Sandford of this novel's Part I regards a woman's necessity of choosing to bind herself to a man "with affright and dismay" (Inchbald 129), how much more so Matilda, who has the painful experience of her mother and the malevolent characters of both Elmwood and Margrave to inform her all too rational resistance?

Strategic Submission

Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood overconfidently breached "the boundaries separating licit and illicit female conduct" (Conway 198), and her daughter, having witnessed the pathetic end result of her mother's hubris, has no intention whatsoever of replicating that bold experiment. Instead, Matilda promises her mother "whatever her fate was, to submit with patience" (Inchbald 217). Rather than shockingly violate cultural strictures regarding femininity, she lives pointedly within them, fulfilling that promise by adopting a hyperfeminine, hypersubmissive persona. In so doing, she just as pointedly exposes the misogyny that would punish her despite the virtuous, correct behaviour she unerringly exhibits. The etymology of "Mat(h)ilda" hints to the reader that this is no shrinking violet: the name literally means "powerful in battle" (from the German maht, might or power, and hiltia, battle).[139] Her seizure of power is, wisely, done only gradually and with great care, given that direct confrontation with the ruling powers is not in any woman's best interests. Nevertheless, by superficially acceding to a making invisible/inaudible of herself, she is able to protest the male's perceived right to deny her existence and enjoy privileges that depend on the disappearance or silencing of half the population. In my reading, Matilda does not by her overt submissiveness act complicitly with the objectives of the patriarchy, but rather effects a subtle and moving rebellion against them.

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[139] Matilda was also the name of a 12th-century queen pretender in England, the daughter of Henry I, who had her throne usurped by a cousin (the preferred candidate of the barons, who did not want to be ruled by a woman following their sovereign's death). Civil war raged between her forces and those of King Stephen for some ten years, with the latter eventually victorious but forced to name Matilda's son as his successor. As an interesting aside, this next king, Henry Plantagenet, married Eleanor of Aquitaine, and the couple became patrons to Marie de France, as explained in my second chapter.

The more typically deferential female is represented in A Simple Story by women such as the spinster Miss Woodley or Miss Fenton, who is temporarily engaged to Elmwood (i.e., when he assumes his late cousin's title, he also assumes his fiancée as a matter of course), but eventually enters a nunnery instead. Despite her apparent bowing to the dictates of her father, no reader could confuse the passionately alive Matilda with either of these passive characters, who experience and/or express few if any desires or needs of their own. The extremely reserved Miss Fenton provides an excellent foil to help us understand Matilda, in that the former does not appear even to possess a personality. Like Austen's Jane Fairfax in Emma, this is a model of obligingly dull womanhood: "Not to admire Miss Fenton was impossible—to find a fault in her person or sentiments was equally impossible—and yet to love her, was very unlikely" (Inchbald 37). When Elmwood decides his affections lie elsewhere, Miss Fenton is utterly unaffected by the change in marriage plans: "she would have been content to have married, she was contented to live single" (Inchbald 137). All eventualities are met by her with "the same insipid smile of approbation and the same cold indifference at the heart" (Inchbald 137). Both Miss Milner and Matilda are by contrast too emotionally and intellectually vibrant to rest content no matter what—they desire the happiness and freedom they deserve and must therefore struggle with the flawed and harmful paradigm that makes these goals unobtainable.

Dorriforth/Elmwood demands the upper hand in his relationships, particularly with his wife and daughter. He openly admits to a deep-seated fear of "the horror of domestic wrangles—a family without subordination" (Inchbald 142), and the subordination he sees as essential for preventing a chaotic household is, obviously, that of the female sex. Miss Milner, "enamored of the dramas of control" (Castle 312), is determined to subvert such a fixed hierarchy, where one sex claims the unquestioned right to dominate the other. She explicitly claims her right not to obey a man unless and until he has a legal claim on her compliance: "As my guardian, I certainly did obey him ; and I could obey him as a husband ; but as a lover, I will not" (Inchbald 154). Furthermore, the wording of this protest should lead some readers to wonder at the prerogative of a man in any of those roles to compel her blind obedience. And this is the woman, let us remember, who establishes the conditions under which Matilda is brought to live with her father. Does the dying Lady Elmwood believe that a letter that reads:

> Receive her into your household, be her condition there ever so abject. … Never see her—but let her sometimes live under the same roof with you. (Inchbald 211)

will shame her estranged husband and, more to the point, Matilda's estranged father, into accepting his parental responsibilities? By offering such a beggarly compromise for their legitimate and innocent daughter, does she expect to touch his heart and achieve an instantaneous rapprochement between the two immediate family members she leaves behind? Does she expect him to accept the terms she sets out, but with a sense of surety that eventually he will soften and yield to more civilized behaviour?

Or is she sincerely putting forward this most humble suggestion? My reading suggests that she has ulterior motives, but Inchbald is too masterful an author to spell things out for her readers, and instead requires us to find the answer by carefully following the story's development.

In any case, these "dramas of control" continue to play out in Part II, but with the female sex now represented by a far more circumspect, wiser young woman than that depicted in Part I. The earlier crisis of Miss Milner is intimately connected with her liminal status as neither unattached maid nor wife: she is a young woman engaged to be married to her much loved guardian, but determined to retain a surprising degree of agency and subjectivity. Matilda's story of liminality definitely engages with and comments on that of her mother, and her own assertion of autonomy reveals a healthy fear of patriarchal retribution. Matilda pays lip service to the construct of a just and benevolent father, but surely this is because she knows that a performance of filial piety is essential to protect herself from further victimization. It is worthwhile to compare Matilda's very real and significant "prudence" with Lord Elmwood's, a character who justifies with that word nearly breaking with his wayward fiancée; not providing any explanation for the lengthy extension of his stay abroad; and subsequently refusing to have anything to do with either his wife or daughter. The narrator explains that any resentment felt towards Lady Elmwood is mixed with "prudence":

> … for prudence he called it not to remind himself of happiness he could never taste again, and of ingratitude that might prompt him to hatred ; and prudence he called it, not to form another attachment near

> to his heart ; more especially so near as a parent's, which might a second time expose him to all the torments of ingratitude, from one whom he affectionately loved. (Inchbald 202)

This much ballyhooed judiciousness is revealed as more often than not merely masculine caprice, arrogance, and inhumanity. By her various acts of strategic submission to this man, Matilda obtains at least a temporary respite and a chance to alter her life prospects for the better.

The patriarchy may act in such a way as to humiliate and degrade her, but nothing can diminish the survival instinct and strong sense of self that enable Matilda, like the ever-patient Griselda, to rise above the mortifying and come out on top. She is not without her moments of rage, but is careful never to allow them to tempt her into a self-destructive act such as direct confrontation. The most Matilda does is, in the neat expression of Caroline Gonda, to "meditate a disobedient display of submission" (Gonda 188). I have earlier described the two occasions when she dares to contemplate violating the paternal strictures and throw herself at his feet; on neither occasion does she act on these disobedient, self-sacrificial impulses. Furthermore, when she does feel the need to speak out in anger, she is intelligent enough to direct that emotional outburst toward a less dangerous object than the person who holds utter authority over her life; rather than cursing her unpaternal parent, she verbally abuses his ward (and her own suitor). Toward her father, she is virtually always noticeably silent.

I have already discussed, regarding the behaviour of Guilliadun, how the stereotypical feminine display of passivity via such acts as swooning can be read as a subversive strategy. Matilda's fainting fit as well may be characterized as a very fitting faint… or feint. Whether involuntary or contrived, a well-timed loss of consciousness certainly has its uses, namely to attain power over one's opponent when one is otherwise helpless:

> When Lord Elmwood makes signs of relinquishing his daughter's body, Matilda recovers long enough to beg, "'Save me.'" … Matilda renders the figure of masculine authority passive once more, seeming to trigger a castration anxiety in her father—'Her voice unmanned him'—which in turn allows for the release of his repressed feelings. … Matilda reduces her father to a hapless lover once more, placing him in the only powerless position he has ever known—that of Miss Milner's fiancé. (Conway 205)

Is not figurative castration of the oppressive male perhaps the best revenge possible for a woman, particularly for the daughter of Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood, who had once so desired to tame or subordinate him? Along these lines, spatial theorist Yi-Fu Tuan writes about the potential power of a display of passivity in the following passage, throughout which I see no reason why "swooning" cannot readily be substituted for "sleeping":

> The status of the sleeping body is curious. On the one hand, it seems a mere object vulnerable to the predatory gaze of others. On the other hand, a sleeping body can emanate a sense of power. People may gaze but not too close. Any time the eyes may open and in a flash destroy a relationship of inferiority and superiority. An aura of drama can

> surround a sleeping body—the drama of its imminent repossession of a world. (Tuan 237)

Elmwood would deny the vulnerable Matilda authorship of her own story, as he tries to subsume her under her mother's, but she quietly refuses to be written into a tragic end. With an act of cautious resistance to patriarchal control and masculine predation in general, Matilda looks to wrest possession of her identity, body, and future away from this uncompromising male by reversing (or at least putting into question) the current dynamic of his superiority to her inferiority.

Part I sets up the binary of centre (populated by highly educated men of influence such as Dorriforth and Sandford) and margin (populated by powerless, dependent women and children, such as Miss Woodley and the orphaned Rushbrook) and then proceeds to problematize that binary by means of the independent-minded Miss Milner. She believes that her great beauty, wit, and wealth should give her access to masculine power and self-determination, and that she should be allowed to live her own life as she chooses. Moreover, she believes that she should also be able to exercise a certain amount of power over others, namely the man who claims to be devoted to her. Miss Milner's recognition of how her own nature fatally incorporates aspects of both "good" and "bad" women is best summed up when she stunningly confesses to Miss Woodley that she loves Dorriforth "with all the passion of a mistress, and with all the tenderness of a wife" (Inchbald 72). She knows herself secretly to be both lady and whore, in other words. Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood ultimately fails in her struggle to be defined by her own terms: the period of her engagement is one long, drawn-out battle of wills that she loses; her marriage eventually breaks down; she must withdraw, disgraced, from the aristocratic life of ease that she has known; and finally she must beg her estranged husband to grant her last request by taking pity on their daughter. By her example of a woman who simply will not fit, she cannot help but bequeath to Matilda a strong sense of the unsustainability of the rigid and false binary model that has condemned her.

An androgynous heroine clearly undermines male/female polarities that are too often assumed to be natural. Miss Milner may have ventured to don a sexually ambiguous costume for the masquerade—while her maid insists that the outfit was that of a woman (i.e., the goddess Diana), a male servant claims that Miss Milner had left the house wearing "man's cloaths" (Inchbald 160). The insistently liminal Matilda, however, goes a significant step further: she replays her mother's comparatively minor gender-bending rebellion in her very person, exhibiting an inherent and thus more troubling gender ambivalence. Many critics (e.g., Castle, Conway, and Haggerty) have pointed out that Matilda possesses both masculine and feminine qualities. An über-feminine submissiveness masks an utterly contradictory strength of will and purpose that is quite masculine in nature; her face and body may bear a strong maternal resemblance, but her personality just as strongly resembles that of the father. Both mother's and daughter's stories "demonstrat[e], as few of the decade's [the 1790s] other novels do, the costs of harmonizing rationality and emotion, 'masculine' power and 'feminine' sympathy" (Spacks 195). If Matilda possesses "the manly resentment of her father" (Inchbald 259), as we are told that she does, it would seem clear that it is directed at least partially at the gendered taboos that constrain her every move and seem set to doom her. A refusal to fit neatly into either category reveals that the masculine/feminine dichotomy on which the social structure is based and which operates to disempower women is overly simplistic, but merely appropriating what supposedly belongs to the opposite gender is not offered as a panacea. The daughter carries on the battle to reconcile the conflicts that her mother lived before her.

In her Introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of *A Simple Story*, Spencer characterises Matilda as passive and yielding, and claims that Inchbald offers a typical fictional ending where all live happily ever after. This is, I think, far from the most appropriate way to read the closing scene, much less the entire work. Conway notes that the novel as a whole suggests "the extent to which marriage guarantees only loss for woman in a social world governed by dictatorial patriarchs such as Lord Elmwood" (Conway 200), and that Matilda's significant hesitation upon Rushbrook's proposal "invites us to contemplate a perverse twist instead of the pat resolution we are offered" (Conway 208). That such a straightforward resolution is provided is certainly not borne out by a close reading of the text. As the impassioned suitor reminds his beloved that she holds "the power over his happiness or misery" (Inchbald 337)—and note that it is his own happiness and not hers that appears to be at issue here—and stands impatiently by for her reply, the narrator chooses to mock the romance conventions that invite readers to expect that happy ending:

> Whether the heart of Matilda such as it has been described *could* sentence him to misery, the reader is left to surmise—and if he supposes that it did not, he has every reason to suppose that their wedded life was a life of happiness. (Inchbald 337)

The story's conclusion is not at all sentimental or straightforward, regardless of how many critics have chosen to read it that way. Inchbald here categorically problematizes the promise of feminine paradise in wedlock as compensation for the suffering and limitations they must endure by reason of their sex. After all, has anything of import really changed even now that the father has accepted his daughter? The hesitation, Matilda's remaining on the threshold, must instead be read as harking back to the preceding narrative and the "ferocious power struggles" (Spacks 190) depicted there.

Matilda does not attend masquerade balls or otherwise defy the social limits imposed upon women of a certain class and age by speaking or stepping out of the constricting space allotted her. Nevertheless, she does manage in a quite revolutionary way to question those limits, both physical and psychological, by her very refusal to transgress. Her mother's passion and wilfulness had been beyond the pale for respectable females, even before she became a fallen woman, and so Matilda tries instead to (over-)perform the bounded femininity that society imposes upon her. Moers has famously argued for "travelling heroinism" as the great innovation of the female gothic, where characters such as Radcliffe's Emily St. Aubert find themselves dragged across France and Italy, through impenetrable forests and over banditti-infested mountaintops, as their stories unfold. Nevertheless, as Betty Rizzo comments in "Renegotiating the Gothic" (2000):

> sometimes even more important if less obvious than their unusual amount of movement is their ratiocinative activity and exploration: cast upon their own resources with no paternal or uxorial guide, they

> express curiosity and investigate; they speculate on their discoveries; they theorize; they act .... (Rizzo 61-62)

Matilda recognizes the oppressive dangers that surround her and, even more importantly, knows that "getting out of danger hinges on understanding herself, her situation, and the nature of her adversary" (Rizzo 62). She is just the sort of self-contained heroine Rizzo describes, and the representation of the unsustainable circumstances in which she is forced to think and act insists that we question the boundaries within which women are sentenced to live.

It should be underscored that middle-class women, with a new-found leisure and access to learning, were gaining a certain position of influence in the production and circulation of literature during the eighteenth century. Becoming "a significant part of the reading public" (Ellis x) in the Western world for the first time, they helped determine what kind of novels were written. They also themselves took up the pen in great numbers, and works by and about women frequently operated as a way to speak of the unspoken or unspeakable in their culture. In Inchbald's day, there was in fact a new-found freedom of expression for women, and many fictional heroines are made to make speeches pertaining to the current or potential circumstances of female lives. Such a prise de parole obviously allows a voicing of needs, fears, and desires. Nonetheless, with Matilda's striking silence throughout the novel and especially at its close, Inchbald shows how a woman can also make herself heard by conversely not speaking. Rushbrook asks her to marry him in the final pages, and we as readers are left with Matilda still occupying the limen, not yet saying either yes or no. Her deliberate self-silencing at such a pivotal moment urges readers to consider what her situation and entire characterization is actually saying about the condition of women and their limited choices.

Like Murasaki Shikibu and Marie de France, Elizabeth Inchbald covertly condemns the circumstances that have rendered her heroine displaced, dependent, and thereby apparently fated to suffer disempowerment. Those who can read between the lines will find an extremely powerful criticism of the patriarchal system and its foundations. Matilda's non-voicing of consent parodies the generally accepted signification of female tractability; her response is diametrically opposed to the utter passivity of a Miss Fenton, for instance. If "[s]elf-silencing … comes to stand in for chastity, to represent and discursively replace it" (Shaffer 117) in much eighteenth-century fiction, Matilda's take on it stands instead for social protest and rebellion. It speaks directly to the fact that for an intelligent, self-aware woman to thrive or even survive (even when she has "won" by being welcomed back into the patriarchal fold), she must sometimes quite intentionally reserve comment.

Doris Bargen suggests that "the inconclusive 'end' of Murasaki Shikibu's narrative invites the reader … to speculate beyond the boundary of the text" (Bargen 192). Inchbald likewise invites her reader into the process of narrative creation—imagine the ending, she tells us, you have the power to shift position from reader to writer, from consumer to creator. You can write your own story's end: what do you think should happen? The open ending accords an unusual degree of agency to what is normally a more passively constructed readerly role, allowing us access to the narrative construct, urging us to cross from the real world into the fictional, to exist simultaneously as reader and author. This final authorial act thus effectively comments on not only the liminality motif found throughout the entire tale, but also the value of ostensibly ceding power to another. Williams insightfully comments that ultimately the text "does not so much conclude, as include, opening itself to other times, other minds, other texts, other readings" (Williams 58). Elizabeth Inchbald herself may strategically submit to others by allowing her readers to imagine the ending of this story for themselves, but in so doing she masterfully directs the more alert among them to notice that the author is nonetheless always in full control.

A Special Province

The argument has been made for an "exploitation of liminality" as "the most revolutionary aspect" of early English prose fiction in general:

> These fictions were bringing together the public and private, mediating exchange value and use value, politicizing and privatizing their subjects, dramatizing the turn from a religious to a secular world, and their authors [were] often in liminal positions themselves—women, Nonconformists, Catholics, and socially marginal men … They and their texts occupied a liminal space. (Backscheider 18)

Backscheider explains that although the concept was developed in anthropology to analyse maturity and initiation rites, "liminal spaces in the best novels go beyond that to form a special province of world discovering and problem solving" (Backscheider 18). Literary liminality has indeed proven efficacious for many women writers (such as those dealt with in this dissertation) who want to explore how and why their world is structured the way it is and attempt to illuminate the problems of socially constructed and constricting dichotomies. No simple resolution is proposed, nonetheless, as these novelistic spaces "are not usually created to bring about a familiar, determinate, socially sanctioned state of being" (Backscheider 18), but rather precisely to challenge what is or has been familiar and socially prescribed.

Women have been relegated to the weaker, more passive side of binary structures, with such polarities especially evident in eighteenth-century discourse. As Spacks notes,

> Self-love and social, reason and feeling, sublime and beautiful, art and nature: over and over the period's writers divide the moral, psychological, intellectual, or aesthetic universe in half. Many of the divisions subsume themselves readily under the fundamental separations of socially contrived gender. (Spacks 235)

A Simple Story offers one of those "plots of the 1790s [that], whether optimistic or despairing in their social implications, call attention to heightened levels of consciousness about the meanings of polarities more readily assumed earlier in the century" (Spacks 202). Matilda's storyline, in particular, comprises a thoughtful exploration of possibilities outside of the binaries of good/bad, dominant/subservient, and innocent/guilty by which her father and the repressive forces that he represents organize the two sexes. Herself an intelligent, self-made woman who entered wholeheartedly into the social and political discussions of her age and was respected and emulated by contemporary writers, both female and male; and as a Catholic who lived in a distinctly Protestant community and, moreover, did not always meekly submit to the Church's authority, Elizabeth Inchbald with this text "tacitly asserts an end to polarities[, positing that t]he universe need not be conceived as a series of binary oppositions" (Spacks 238).

Michael Boardman rightly notes that "Inchbald begins her novels with external barriers" (such as, in this case, Dorriforth's vow of celibacy that initially stands in the way of a love relationship with Miss Milner) and moves on to "create[…] a separate set of boundary lines, much more formidable, rooted in [the] radically different characters" (Boardman 212) of the lovely young ward and her guardian.[140] These social and psychological barriers are, I contend, then explored more profoundly as the following generation is trapped by and learns to exploit them. The spaces on either side of the boundary line that Matilda occupies can certainly be viewed as "anti-spaces," which, being "constrictive and morbid […], signify a stagnation that opposes movement" (Bronfen 15) or even survival itself. Neither side constitutes a feasible option, and so she takes ownership of an imposed liminality to express, with a disingenuous posture of submission, her will to have a say in the all-important threshold crossings that will define her future. Inchbald rejects any facile resolution for dealing with socially constructed boundary lines, such as having her heroine pass unproblematically into the happy-ever-after postliminal state of wedlock offered by Rushbrook, with the implicit approval of Elmwood. Instead, our author poses indispensable questions about male and female subject positions, polarized as they are into power and weakness, privilege and dependence, dominance and subordination.

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[140] It would be remiss of me not to point out that this insight is found in an article polemically titled "An Anti-Ideological Reading," and that Boardman would surely disagree with my own analysis of A Simple Story. In his article, Boardman takes umbrage at the "ideological" readings of other, feminist critics "who think … in terms of patriarchy" (217), stating that "only critics who begin by assuming all narrative must be political can find political meaning in Inchbald" (209). One would, I think, be within one's rights in questioning the ideology behind this so-called anti-ideological stance.

A Simple Story must be acknowledged as equally important in relation to both women's writing and the rise of the novel overall. If Inchbald's work "'failed' to conform to the standards of realism and quality on which Watt and others explicitly or implicitly relied, [it] also 'failed' to be what many critics thought novels, especially novels by women, ought to be" (Johnson 18), namely apolitical and unassuming. Its narrative disjunction and over-the-top elements are distinctly, provocatively meaningful, linking liminality and femininity in a unique and striking way as parts I and II dissect the lives of both mother and daughter as they intersect with that of the father. The tragedy of Miss Milner/Lady Elmwood's fall and self-exile is remade into a departure point for consideration of the way things are for women in general and the way they could perhaps be. Williams, in discussing the so-called family scandals omnipresent in gothic, points out how they

> rather melodramatically call attention to the importance of boundaries: the literal and figurative processes by which society organizes itself, "draws the line," declaring this "legitimate," that not; this "proper," that not; this "sane," that not, rules and divisions that structure all dimensions of human life. … A desire to "draw the line" … appears to be a very basic human impulse—or at least a deeply ingrained cultural habit: the "natural" first step toward knowing. (Williams 12)

According to Elmwood's way of thinking, the line connecting him to his wife and child can be unilaterally negated, but the actions he takes to give Matilda merely a nominal role as daughter backfire. Like Margrave, the father believes that his needs and desires should predominate at the young woman's expense, and by showing us the direct, detrimental results of this androcentric belief structure, Part II of A Simple Story urges us to ask what kind of protection of a woman's person can be offered in the denial of her person. Both Elmwood and Margrave claim to offer Matilda everything she could desire (e.g., shelter, sustenance, and luxurious surroundings), all the while disallowing the one essential thing: access to a stable, autonomous social position guaranteed through a recognized relationship with the power structure. By literalizing a woman in limbo, metaphorically made to disappear from the patriarchal worldview, Inchbald powerfully negotiates with the existing gendered hierarchies built on misogynistic foundations.

As explained in my introduction to this dissertation, subjectivity must be understood at least partially as the control of one's own actual and figurative space, the ability for self-determination within parameters that one is empowered to establish and enforce. Ian Balfour, in his discussion of the problematized promise in writings by both Inchbald and her contemporary William Godwin, underscores the "complicated thematics and semiotics of inside and outside" (Balfour ft. 36, p. 250) set up throughout A Simple Story. Interior and exterior obviously do not exist independently of one another, but rather only by virtue of the line that separates them, the liminal stress line that relates inner to outer and here to there. It is no accident that the fateful meeting of Lord Elmwood and his daughter takes place in a stairwell, which serves not only architecturally to link her inner rooms to the outside world, but also metaphorically as a vertical bridge, the quintessential structure for crossing from one state to another. Our author clearly understands that the "point of maximum tension … always coincides with a threshold or boundary" (Colomina 95), and therefore makes central use of the liminality motif to interrogate the supposed security for women promised under the prevailing system. Matilda's tale involves two banishments "from the ancestral home where she has always been an outsider" (Parker 9), followed by a proposal of marriage, which offers to redeem her status. The conclusion does not, however, contrary to what Parker and many other critics have argued, offer the daughter "restoration to that home as a beloved insider" (Parker 9). The genius of Inchbald is reflected by the way that she instead leaves her heroine perched on the threshold, an insider only insofar as patriarchal whim and favour may decree and thus in fact existentially liminal.

In her influential study of gothic, Ellis writes of "the distinctly masculine problem of the threshold, engendered because men not only can but must move back and forth between the male and female spheres" (Ellis 166), whereas women remain more or less confined within the interior. However, Inchbald's first novel takes us in a highly sophisticated manner far beyond a simplistic understanding of masculine exterior and feminine interior, and demands that the problematic threshold between these two polarized spaces be recognized rather as a distinctly feminine concern. Inchbald's interest lies in the indeterminacy of the female condition and so, rather than merely reversing the gendered "separate spheres" paradigm, she disrupts that very notion in this novel. Where both masculine and feminine spheres are defined and policed by the dominant patriarchy to the detriment of women, it is only in a third kind of space, located outside that dichotomous territory, that dissenting voices can truly be expressed. Matilda expands the boundary itself into a refuge where she can exist on her own terms and find at least the possibility of self-determination.

Elmwood has tried to define his daughter negatively, as irrelevant to the male-dominated centre/margin structure, but Matilda turns the tables and embraces that negative space as an empowering one where she can undermine the very structures that victimize her. The limen offers at least qualified liberation for an active agent, a form of independence from false, damaging dichotomies. The twin strategies of having Matilda be and not be simultaneously and having the novel split disjunctively into two distinct stories create extraordinarily meaningful bifurcations, characterized by Backscheider as "a gap that forces judgment even as it resists interpretation" (Backscheider 18). Inchbald once commented (in a piece she wrote in 1807) on the liberty to be enjoyed by writing fiction: "The Novelist is a free agent" (qtd. in Conway 209). In reference to that remark, Conway correctly states that "A Simple Story demonstrates this point in the freedom it takes both with its narrative structure and its subject matter" (Conway 209). Matilda's story is a direct challenge to the binary model enforced by the patriarchy, criticising prevailing assumptions and practices as misogynistic and pointing out the need for change.

* * *

Gilbert and Gubar comment that "[b]y the end of the eighteenth century, … women were not only writing, they were conceiving fictional worlds in which patriarchal images and conventions were severely, radically revised" (Gilbert and

Gubar, Madwoman, 44). I have demonstrated that this is true for authors in many other times and places as well. As mentioned in my Chapter Two, others have likewise argued for reading women's writing over the centuries as a tradition based on the similar "challenges and prejudices" that all "women living public lives" (Ferrante, Glory of Her Sex, 213) necessarily faced. What Elizabeth Inchbald does with Lady Matilda, in a strikingly similar way to what Murasaki Shikibu does with Ukifune and Marie de France with Guilliadun, is make of the boundary a powerful narrative image for examining the reality of gender relations and imagining less exploitative configurations of power than found within the prevalent, androcentric binary structures.

With great "subtlety of imaginative statement" (Castle 290), Inchbald speaks the unspeakable and makes explicit the normally implicit consequences of a woman asserting herself, of "dar[ing] to break through the limits" (Inchbald 218). A Simple Story, which has been called "the first feminist romance" (Castle 320), identifies, analyses, and finally deconstructs gendered boundaries in both an extreme and an exquisite way. In its incisive exploration of a misogynistic social structure that victimizes women who do not conform, the entire novel functions as a biting critique of patriarchal dictates and thus of dictatorial patriarchy. It has been written of Wollstonecraft and Charlotte Smith that their novels "attack the barriers between their heroines and the happiness they so richly deserve" (Ellis 76). Inchbald conversely reveals that the problem is not merely a matter of conquering barriers, since by transgressing women find they merely emerge into yet another constricting space. A tactical retreat to the borderline itself offers a form of respite as the heroine struggles to come to terms with her liminal body and life as a female.

In this and previous chapters, I have sought to demonstrate how certain women authors in widely differing times and places have employed liminality to represent a woman's socially constructed dilemma. The fourth and final chapter will examine one additional case of liminal heroinism, namely Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth. Lily, trapped in the "betwixt-and-between" state of une jeune fille à marier, proves herself unable or unwilling to move off the threshold into what her society defines as a successful postliminal state. Unlike the other authors I have discussed, who seem willing at least to contemplate the liminal as a refuge from within which alternate possibilities may be imagined, this one sees no progressive, optimistic way out of the impasse. Nevertheless, to Wharton, just as to Murasaki Shikibu, Marie de France, and Elizabeth Inchbald, the liminal definitely constitutes for her heroine a "special province" for understanding the damaging binaries of the world in which she must make her way.

"Nine-and-twenty, and still Miss Bart": Homeless in the House of Fools

[...] the greatest thing by far is to be
a master of metaphor.
- Aristotle, *Poetics*

Beyond?

If it is true, as has been claimed by critics since at least the 1960s, that Edith Wharton lacks "the vocabulary of happiness" (Irving Howe, qtd. in Joslin 133),[141] it may well be because she is so very often concerned with the socially constructed vulnerability of women and the limited opportunities they are afforded. The aim of her 1905 novel The House of Mirth in particular is to expose the difficulties women encounter in successfully negotiating relations with the opposite sex and finding their place in the world. Accordingly, our author draws much-needed attention to what has been called "the absence of scripts for women after girlhood, the need for a language of female growth and mastery" (MacMaster 221), and how she so masterfully illustrates that lack can be usefully analyzed by means of the concept of liminality. While two later Wharton novels, Ethan Frome (1911) and Summer (1917), have been described elsewhere as "drama[s] of the threshold" (Wolff 293), in my reading it is this earlier work to which the label most aptly applies. The House of Mirth quite clearly depicts an extended liminal state, and one that is both explicitly gendered and powerfully meaningful. Similarly to the other characters discussed in this dissertation, Miss Lily Bart balances precariously betwixt and between social standings and stages of development: her status as an adult woman not yet spoken for or possessed by a man means that she cannot easily be defined as either child or wife, virgin or "whore." Commenting negatively on the romantic conception of marriage as a female utopia, her story exposes the chimera of freedom and power for women within a social system that persists in seeing wedlock as their sole ambition and denying them the autonomy they need. Wharton's heroine has been helpfully likened to Edna Pelletier in Kate Chopin's roughly contemporaneous The Awakening (1899), in that "[r]ather than provide paradigms of uplift, [they both] exist to challenge, to provoke, and to warn" (Wershoven, "Arrested Development," 29). Lily's failure to achieve the normative state of married woman does function as a warning, and on many levels a challenge and a provocation as well, concerning the implications of dysfunctional gender relations.

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[141] In Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit (1998), Carol Singley similarly remarks, "It is usually not possible to speak of happiness in Wharton's fiction, a fact that leads critics to note that reality, not romance, characterizes her work" (Singley 211).

What I have been examining throughout this dissertation are problematized initiation episodes, whereby a female character finds herself enticingly but awkwardly situated outside the ordinary structural roles that constitute her world. Each of the authors discussed intriguingly depicts a stalling of the heroine's courtship narrative during the liminal phase, when she has clearly left behind the preliminal stage of childhood but nonetheless resists incorporation into the postliminal stage of wife under the terms and conditions prevailing in her society. This final chapter turns to Wharton's The House of Mirth to demonstrate how yet another woman writer makes use of liminal imagery to explode the rigid and oppressive dichotomies of masculine/feminine, centre/margin, and power/weakness. Lily cannot bring herself to accept the mercenary marriage typically contracted by members of her gender and class, nor does she realistically see any escape from the flawed paradigm in a relationship with Lawrence Selden (a handsome but penniless lawyer) who, for all his superior attitudes regarding the mores of their friends and acquaintances, remains by virtue of his sex a member of the ruling patriarchy. Much less does she hope for a life like that of the well-meaning but ultimately pathetic spinster Gertrude (Gerty) Farish. By procrastinating, committing innocent or at least minor faux pas, and otherwise consistently missing her mark, Lily remains for over a decade in an in-between state, where she is "liberated from normative demands" (Turner, Dramas, 13) and able to adopt a posture of resistance, no matter how doomed.

My argument has been that with the "rich heuristic tool for cultural critique" (Sutton, "Liminal Attributes," 26) that the liminality model comprises, we can better read and understand how all of these authors lay bare the disequilibrium of power in gendered relationships effected by the repressive patriarchal system. Just as in the Genji Monogatari, Eliduc, and A Simple Story, we have here a distinctly ambiguous figure lacking any stable, secure place, whose story powerfully explores the problem of liminal femininity. Gilbert and Gubar have stated that while "Edith Wharton was neither in theory nor in practice a feminist, her major fictions, taken together, constitute perhaps the most searching—and searing—feminist analysis of the construction of 'femininity' produced by any novelist in this [the 20th] century" (Gilbert, No Man's Land, 128). As one of her major works, indeed that which established the novelist as a force to be reckoned with, The House of Mirth takes a long, hard look at how and why the category "female" is constructed as it is.

From start to finish, Lily Bart functions as a quintessential liminal figure. She is "no longer classified and not yet classified" (Turner, Forest of Symbols, 96) in terms of both class and gender: a "jeune fille à marier" (Wharton, The House of Mirth, 68)[142] who stubbornly resists marriage and a member of the elite who finds herself rapidly descending the social (and economic) ladder. Despite being raised precisely to succeed in the high-stakes marriage market and having this goal impressed upon her as her sole legitimate ambition, and despite the fact that she is able to envision no reasonable alternative, Lily has come, "at heart, [to] despise… the things she's trying for" (HM 184). Her only means of passage across the requisite developmental threshold entails selling herself to a man and thus closing off any possibility of an independent life, and from such a fate she instinctively recoils. As is the case for Ukifune, Guilliadun, and Matilda, this inconvenient woman has nowhere to "be" legitimately and so attempts to extend the transient, liminal moment—that "gap between ordered worlds" (Turner, Dramas, 13)—when she still has choices in front of her. She can, however, feel time relentlessly closing in: "Younger and plainer girls had been married off by the dozens, and she was nine-and-twenty, and still Miss Bart" (HM 38).

Where Ukifune, we'll recall, is fated to be tossed away by various men until finally fleeing into a nunnery, Lily turns the tables on this misogynist paradigm and herself rejects one by one the men who would, as she anticipates with regard to Percy Gryce, "ultimately decide to do her the honor of boring her for life" (HM 25). This heroine does not simply fail to attain a husband; she is quite deliberate in her actions, even though she wisely plays out her strategy of resistance in an apparently passive, submissive manner. While Lily tacitly accepts the justice of her friends' exasperated scolding and indeed berates herself for failing to seal a bargain with any of her suitors over the years, it is gradually revealed that it is none but she herself who has sabotaged these arrangements. In the preceding chapter, I described how Elizabeth Inchbald brings her novel to a close at the exact moment when Matilda, faced with a marriage proposal, stands on the verge of attaining the postliminal state (i.e., reintegration into her father's world) to which she is entitled by birth. That entire story, however, demonstrates that no woman holds any social status that is not subject to the whim and favour of the masculine hegemony and therefore urges its readers to contemplate other possibilities. The more relentlessly pessimistic Wharton, with eyes wide open to the limited, disadvantageous options available to women, does not in the end allow Lily to remain on this threshold, in the mediative stage of courtship. The House of Mirth literalizes the marriage or death choice traditionally facing romance heroines as the implicit is made explicit, and the ritual closure marked by passage across the limen takes the form of a funereal scene.

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[142] All subsequent references to this work will refer to this edition and be identified in the text simply as "HM."

Although none has explored the notion in any great depth (as I will do in the following pages), numerous critics have already identified certain liminal aspects of The House of Mirth's troubled and troubling heroine. It has been noted, for instance, that "Lily defies classification" (Goodman 50), that she "lives at the edge of permissible behavior" (Howard 141), and that she "falls between two stools" (Auchincloss 70). Annette Benert draws attention to the repeated trope of "Lily's delicately poised position between public and private spaces" (Benert 26), and the fact that she is fatally "trapped between inside and outside, between harsh economics and hazy romance" (Benert 27). She is neither young nor old, mistress nor servant, wealthy nor destitute, but is instead located in the awkward, unstable middle ground of a "relatively poor" (HM 48) 30-year-old virgin who must assist her friends with tasks of social drudgery in exchange for continued hospitality in their homes. Shari Benstock explains that ever since the novel's publication, "Lily Bart has been seen in sets of oppositions—rebellious and independent, on the one hand, and as victim of a corrupt society on the other; a woman who simultaneously procrastinated and acted too quickly…" (Benstock, "Critical History," 314).[143] Many critics have argued that such dualistic thinking marks a weakness in Wharton's writing. Novelist Henry James, for example (who happened to be one of her lifelong friends), is frequently cited as judging The House of Mirth to be "two books and too confused" (qtd. in Lewis 153). But surely the disturbing bifurcation or fundamental ambivalence is part and parcel of its message concerning the essential difficulty of any woman's quest for subjectivity, agency, and independence. As Maureen Howard writes, "the confusion, if there is any, can be seen as the insoluble dilemma of Lily Bart. She is in transit, literally—between trains, house parties, friends and false friends, high life, low life" (Howard 141-42). Her crisis of existential homelessness functions as a moving critique of the flawed, ruthless civilization that has created her only to be used and then discarded.

Lily has already, as the story opens, been on the marriage market for eleven years, and we follow her career through some seventeen months. By this time she has reached the age of thirty and is therefore well beyond qualifying for even the most elastic definition of girlhood. Of course, Arnold van Gennep was careful to draw a distinction between physical puberty and what he called "social puberty," explaining how the onset of menses or any of the other physiological signs of sexual maturity only rarely coincides with a society's rites of betrothal and marriage, which rites can in certain cases be extended almost indefinitely (see van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, chap. 6). Because she is not permitted to leave behind this metaphorical phase of pubescence except by either marrying or "falling," Lily is, like Guilliadun with her own self-induced stasis, located in a time that is no time, just as Ukifune and Matilda find themselves in a place that is no place, subject to a mise en abyme pattern of concealment and exposure in the one case and a performance of absence in the other. Her period of social puberty (i.e., the stage of being neither unformed girl nor yet full-fledged woman) lasts from the age of 18 to her death, thereby problematizing this purportedly natural marker of a woman's socially mandated transition. The only way of supporting herself or deciding her future is through the mediation of men, and so Lily is denied any self determination. We watch as she tries to find her way and assert her right to independence, in a situation where her social, emotional, and even physical survival is at stake. The disequilibrium of power is too strong for any happy resolution, however, and this subversive response to female exploitation concludes darkly.

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[143] Singley even claims that Lily "is caught at a cultural intersection of the secular and the sacred" (Singley 73), which may well remind us of Murasaki Shikibu's Ukifune.

The House of Mirth is a profoundly pessimistic novel, not least because the protagonist dies from her own hand at its close (while she does not actually commit suicide, the decision to increase her nightly dose of chloral in a desperate craving for repose proves lethal). The theme of death has already appeared, in various guises, in the other texts discussed, employed strategically as a means of resolving the threatening impasse in which the heroine is mired. With Ukifune, we have an apparent drowning staged in order to escape finally into a welcome anonymity; with Guilliadun, we see a coma induced to cope with an impossible love triangle; and with Matilda, we have a disingenuous willingness to "not be," where "being" would bring her face to face with a punitive despot. All three, however, employ only a semblance of dying and go on to survive their life crisis more or less happily, whereas for Lily resolution takes the form of actual, physical demise. Inevitably, the only survival strategy available to her takes the form of non-survival: incorporation, or reintegration into society via marriage is simply not adequate compensation for the sacrifices it entails, and so she crosses instead into permanent non-existence. The motto imprinted on Lily's stationery—"a grey seal with Beyond! beneath a flying ship" (HM 152)—provides an ironic comment on the restricted futures available to women. However, precisely because it is by refusing any of the other postliminal states on offer that she finds her self and is able to retain a form of independence, there is a paradoxical sense of empowerment inherent even in her death. This heroine resists the normative transition, which would mean the dystopia of patriarchal marriage, but she is able to do so only by literally ceasing to exist, which is the ultimate dystopic conclusion. Insofar as Lily dies at story's end, this feminine strategy for avoiding exploitation may appear merely self-defeating, but there is undeniable agency expressed by not having sold out to the highest bidder, by having ultimately maintained her integrity.

Put another way, Miss Bart has refused to barter herself, and her rejection of an oppressive system takes the form of seizing ownership of an imposed liminality and transforming it into a space of resistance. C.J. Wershoven underscores how this novel "juxtapose[s] images of opposing states of awareness—sleeping/waking, thinking/dreaming, intoxication/lucidity—to underscore the emotional turmoil of the heroine …" (Wershoven, "Arrested Development," 33) and, I argue, her existential liminality. By occupying that in-between stage for much longer than is usual and then progressing to a postliminal stage that few if any expect, Lily never has to capitulate to the societal values that have victimized her and that would, if she had married, have managed to suffocate her entirely. By dying, she also urges others to reconsider their assumptions with regard to her, and perhaps to women in general. This independent-minded woman, by her willful reaction against irreconcilable dichotomies and ambiguous demands, is able to insist on her status as an autonomous individual. Wharton's project here, just like that of my other authors, is to put into question the social practices that fundamentally disadvantage women by denying them any real choices. While the patriarchy and those complicit with its interests act in ways calculated to humiliate and degrade her, and blithely expect her to comply, Lily demonstrates extraordinary strength of character simply by not doing so.

Like the other women writers I discuss, Edith Wharton engages dynamically with the prevailing conceptions of gender, power, and subjectivity by manipulating the body/boundary image based on the threshold's dual role as both restrictive barrier (against which the heroine chafes) and welcome refuge (to which she clings). Lily has opted for an extended stay upon the limen as a means of escaping the ultimate commodification and annihilation she faces: this woman "'fails' on the marriage market because she finally resists the impulse to sell herself, not because she judges the values of that market inaccurately" (Yeazell 25). Her slipping into death is on significant levels an emancipatory act, the last-ditch effort of someone caught between a rock and a hard place. In effect, Lily chooses not to choose from among the equally undesirable roles of wife, prostitute, or spinster, rejecting the exploitive options offered to her and thus underscoring their inadequacy and harmfulness for women who deserve better.[144]

What this fourth and final dissertation chapter seeks to do is close the circle on the particular "chain of ands" (Saussy, "Comparative Literature?," 338) that I have been constructing out of the striking images of liminality to be found in this group of "like-but-unlike" texts. My intention throughout has been to show how the creative juxtaposition allowed by this innovative comparative approach can lead to intriguing insights about the work of these otherwise disparate women writers, how the stories they tell become immeasurably richer when set in this unfamiliar context. The and connecting Wharton's Lily Bart with Murasaki Shikibu's Ukifune, Marie de France's Guilliadun, and Elizabeth Inchbald's Lady Matilda productively builds on and "modif[ies]… the sense of [what] came before" (Saussy, "Comparative Literature?," 338). My admittedly idiosyncratic "constellation of texts" (Damrosch 281) has been selected to highlight how the threshold motif can effectively be used in such a variety of ways to critique and undermine gendered binaries and thereby to destabilize hierarchical social practices and assumptions that disadvantage women. Recognition of the common liminal aspects present in the telling of each of these discrete narratives of courtship establishes a unique vantage point from which to discover valuable similarities within difference concerning their respective responses to the gendered demands and perils of romance.

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[144] "Between the oppressive darkness of Mrs. Peniston's drawing room … and the vulgar glare of a place like the Emporium Hotel … the novel does not really offer its heroine anything to choose" (Yeazell 36).

Background

Edith Newbold Jones was born into an established, tradition-bound family in New York City in 1862 and died an expatriate divorcée in Paris in 1937. These bare biographical facts suggest something of importance in understanding our author and her work, namely that during her lifetime she straddled two immensely different epochs, countries, and cultures. As Susan Goodman writes: "Wharton … was neither 'this' nor 'that,' and it is in these more ambiguous, hard-to pigeonhole details that a fuller picture of a complex woman begins to emerge" (Goodman 5-6). And the literature produced by this writer "nurtured in a Victorian culture [who] then lived on into a newer, modern world" (Tillman 144) is just as complex. Her fiction insightfully explores the progress or lack thereof that these shifting times represented, as well as the changes in women's lives they did or did not imply.

The only daughter and youngest child (12 and 16 years junior, respectively, to her brothers) of an old-money family, Edith enjoyed a childhood of tremendous luxury, but one that by all accounts was lacking in maternal affection (Cynthia Wolff's biography, A Feast of Words, makes much of the strained mother-daughter relationship). Moreover, although the milieu in which she was raised was wealthy and highly refined, it was far from the bookish or creative one in which she might have thrived more fully. Neither of her parents, George Frederic Jones or Lucretia Rhinelander Jones, could be called intellectuals or innovators of any sort, being content with playing inherited roles among the leisured classes, dividing their time primarily between the conventional social scenes of Manhattan and Newport, Rhode Island. As is to be expected, therefore, Edith was educated in the typical manner for girls of her time and social rank, which meant precious little beyond "the modern languages and good manners" (Wharton, Backward Glance, 48). Luckily, she enjoyed access to her father's quite extensive library and (on a more irregular basis) the tutors hired to educate her brothers and a neighbour boy, as well as the drive and innate ability to learn on her own.

In 1885, at what was then considered the fairly advanced age of 23, Edith married Edward Robbins Wharton, or "Teddy." The handsome, easy-going groom was in his mid-thirties. Like her parents, the couple maintained homes in both New York and Newport, but they also made numerous and lengthy trips to Europe. Several critics have interpreted what seems to have been almost non-stop travel in the early years of the marriage as indicative of Edith's need, first, to escape her mother's suffocating influence and continued disapproval, and second, to avoid spending concentrated time alone with the man she had wed. Indeed, despite their similar social standing, these two could not have been less suited to one another. Teddy had no taste for the artistic life his wife valued so highly, preferring to pass his days fishing, shooting, and riding, and neither did he come anywhere close to being her equal in intellectual terms.[145] Moreover, he apparently suffered from some form of mental illness, possibly manic depression (see, especially, Wolff 220-26 and Lewis 272-78 and 282-93), and for years Edith battled with his family to get him into appropriate treatment. Teddy became increasingly difficult and unpredictable and was once even found to have appropriated some of her trust funds and forced to repay them. Eventually, he was also more or less openly carrying on extra-marital affairs. In 1907, Edith took up permanent residence by herself in France, and they were divorced a half dozen years later.

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[145] Henry James once referred to him as "cerebrally compromised Teddy" (qtd. in HM v, foreword).

The strain of their roughly thirty-year marriage took its toll on Edith Wharton's own health and affected her literary productivity, although she did manage to establish a salutary social and creative routine. She took care to surround herself with a circle of talented writers and intellectuals, who provided much appreciated encouragement of her work. By all accounts, throughout her childhood, her parents appear never to have understood how to cope with the needs of an intelligent girl who was not only a voracious reader but also passionate about crafting her own stories (an activity the young Edith referred to as "making up"). An oft-repeated anecdote illustrates the mother's chilly response to one of her daughter's early efforts at writing fiction:

> My first attempt (at the age of eleven) was a novel, which began: "'Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Brown?' said Mrs. Tompkins. 'If only I had known you were going to call I should have tidied up the drawing-room.'" Timorously I submitted this to my mother, and never shall I forget the sudden drop of my creative frenzy when she returned it with

> the icy comment: "Drawing-rooms are always tidy." (Wharton, Backward Glance, 73)

Despite this unpropitious start, Wharton went on to win the Pulitzer prize in 1921, the first woman ever to do so. This success must have offset to a degree her mother and brothers' continued refusal to acknowledge her literary pursuits (her father had died in 1882). In fact, her entire extended family, which included a great proportion of the New York area elite, all steadily ignored her achievements in this line, even after she had become widely renowned, presumably because writing was not deemed a suitable activity for men of their class, much less for women.

Edith Wharton was nonetheless to become one of the major American authors of the early twentieth century. These years are known as the Gilded Age, a time of frantic economic activity, marked by a sudden influx of new money and increasingly hedonistic attitudes. As she explains in her autobiography, the impetus behind writing The House of Mirth was to examine the question of how to find significance in what she viewed as "a society of irresponsible pleasure-seekers" (Wharton, Backward Glance, 207). The conclusion at which Wharton arrived was as follows:

> a frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys. Its tragic implication lies in its power of debasing people and ideals. The answer, in short, was my heroine, Lily Bart. (Wharton, Backward Glance, 207)

The period during which Lily's story is set is also known as the Progressive Era, when new images of female roles and opportunities were rapidly emerging. Much fiction of her time was addressing this revolution of mores, with female characters shedding 19th-century restrictions and expectations. The heroine of The House of Mirth thus not only elucidates the debasement of what is lovely and pure by what is crude and corrupt, but also serves as a transition between and comment on two eras and ideologies.

This two-volume novel concerns just over a year in the life of a single young woman, the poor but strikingly beautiful Lily Bart. Although born and raised in the upper reaches of Manhattan society, she is orphaned and, penniless, must be taken in by an aunt. The widowed and wealthy Mrs. Peniston acts more out of duty than love and, although generous with food, shelter, and the occasional gift, does not opt to formalize the relationship by providing her niece with a regular income. Rapidly approaching the age past which a woman ceases to be marriageable, Lily is anxious to regularize her increasingly unstable situation and escape "the daily friction of unpaid bills, the daily nibble of small temptations to expenditure" (HM 76). She therefore redoubles her efforts to make a good match, bearing in mind all her late mother's advice, but despite the very best intentions repeatedly shrinks from an alliance with any of the men in her circle or in the throngs of social climbers found on its outskirts. The only male who attracts her at all is Selden, who practices law and collects fine first editions—"as much as a man may who has no money to spend" (HM 10). He has been following the glamorous Miss Bart's social career with a bemused interest, and their occasional encounters reveal a mutual understanding and appreciation. Lily cannot see herself marrying without money, however, any more than she can imagine becoming an old maid like Gerty, who lives alone in an unfashionable, cramped apartment and fills her days with acts of minor philanthropy, responding with the pitiful eagerness of the marginal to whatever dregs of attention come her way.

As the story continues, Lily foolhardily discards two opportunities to be well settled: one is the aforementioned Gryce, a dull, timorous millionaire with a valuable collection of Americana he will never read, and the other the up-and-coming businessman Simon Rosedale, a socially unacceptable Jew who manages to be simultaneously "obsequious [and] obtrusive" (HM 91) and who thus repels our delicate heroine. No one can understand Lily's carelessness or fastidiousness, especially as she is known to be in desperate need of financial security. A friend's husband, Gus Trenor, agrees to "invest" a small amount for her in the stock market and is soon handing over large cheques, ostensibly representing the dividends. Of course, he has no intention of remaining uncompensated, although it is not "payment in kind" (HM 144) that he demands, and Lily narrowly escapes a rape attempt. Her reputation begins to tarnish as people suspect her of taking money for sexual favours, and her popularity wanes. When another "friend," Bertha Dorset, accuses her publicly of becoming involved with her husband, George (the accusation is in fact made solely as a cover for Bertha's own dalliances), Lily's always fragile social standing collapses beneath her.

Disowned by her rigid Aunt Peniston and abandoned by the fickle Selden, who both decide to believe the scandalous rumours, Lily is flung on her own resources. At first, she is happily taken up by a group of brash parvenus, who relish her association with the upper crust they wish to emulate and integrate, and then just as happily discarded once her usefulness is depleted. Next, she tries her hand working as social secretary for Mrs. Norma Hatch—an ambitious arriviste in whose company "Lily had an odd sense of being behind the social tapestry, on the side where the threads were knotted and the loose ends hung" (HM 270)—and even as a milliner's assistant, but success stubbornly eludes her. By the end of the novel, the once enormously privileged Miss Lily Bart is living in an ill-furnished boarding-house room, listlessly wandering the streets during the day and drugging herself at night in a failed attempt to secure rest. A small legacy from the now deceased aunt is barely enough to allow her to repay Gus the $9000 she had received from him and settle a few other small debts she had incurred. That done, Lily decides just this once to risk increasing her sleeping dose. This action proves fatal, and the story closes with a penitent Selden rushing, too late, to her bedside to receive from her lifeless lips "the word that ma[kes] all clear" (HM 324), which (interestingly enough) is never explained.

The House of Mirth was an immediate bestseller, and established Edith Wharton, whose poetry and stories had been appearing for some time in such venues as the Atlantic Monthly and Scribner's Magazine,[146] as a serious novelist. The sales figures for the book are nothing short of staggering:

> …30,000 copies were sold in the first three weeks; by the end of a month 60,000 copies had been ordered from Scribner's; ten days later the number reached 80,000; and in another ten days it climbed to 100,000. (Wolff 133)

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[146] Her first book of poems, a privately printed volume, had been brought out when she was only sixteen, but her first novel, The Valley of Decision, did not appear until she was forty (i.e., in 1902). Wharton's identity as a professional writer can be dated from 1897, when she and Ogden Codman, Jr. co-authored a highly successful volume on interior design, titled The Decoration of Houses.

This novel's interest lies in more than the critical and popular acclaim it received, however. Elaine Showalter's influential article entitled "The Death of the Lady (Novelist)" identifies it as among the preeminent works signalling a sea change in women's writing in the United States. She argues that Lily Bart's "crisis of adulthood" actually parallels a much broader literary crisis: "… The House of Mirth is a pivotal text in the historical transition from one house of American woman's fiction to another, from the homosocial women's culture and literature of the nineteenth century to the heterosexual fiction of modernism" (Showalter, "Death of the Lady," 4). Lily's story thus itself plays a liminal role, generically speaking, negotiating between two very different poetics and their conventions and ostensible purposes.

Despite her meteoric rise and the ready audience eager for each new work she produced, Wharton's membership in the Western canon has been neither automatic nor continuous over the years. The literary reputation that this author achieved in the early part of her career slowly declined, and critics generally find the later novels inferior and have even accused her of pandering to a certain lucrative readership. The themes and plotlines of her fiction were often denigrated as stuffy and old-fashioned, and she was dismissed as just another prim Victorian dinosaur. Accordingly, Wharton was long "relegated to the margins of literary history as a novelist of manners or an aloof aristocrat clinging to outmoded values" (Kaplan 65). By the late 1970s, however, feminist scholarship had begun the struggle to bring both the writer and her work back into the light, and has today managed convincingly to reveal her great interest and relevance. Furthermore, with the recent and highly successful release of films based on The Age of Innocence (directed by Martin Scorsese, 1993) and The House of Mirth (directed by Terence Davies, 2000), for example, a very broad-based audience of fans has again developed.

The New Woman

Many critics have pointed to Edith Wharton's sometimes emphatically expressed lack of sympathy for the so-called New Woman of the Progressive Era to prove that she was no feminist. Nonetheless, our author's stance would seem to be more realistic than anti-feminist, especially when considered in the light of her oeuvre. Wharton's entire body of fiction has been termed "a map of feminism's ferment and failure" (Ammons ix) and her personal politics characterized as a "bleakness of vision in the face of a totalizing system she finds at once detestable and inevitable" (Dimock 376). She certainly does place little faith in the emancipatory possibilities of the suffragette, the flapper, or any of the other modern roles that appear to her mind only very superficially to change and liberate the conditions of female existence. While admittedly "not among the activists," Wharton was nonetheless "affected profoundly by the Woman's Movement, and with The House of Mirth, a best-seller in 1905, she became one of its most unlikely yet important independent thinkers and critics" (Ammons 2). Wharton pushed the envelope of what it means to be female in a man's world, challenging normative gender roles with her own life as well as those of her characters.[147] Her "governing themes rise from the recurrent situation of a heroine perceiving an enormous and cruel lack of fit between her personal expectations of life and the social reality" (Ammons 5). Katherine Joslin cites Irving Howe, from 1962, as seeing in Wharton's work as a whole "a suppressed feminist bitterness, a profound impatience with the claims of the ruling sex" (Joslin 54). While emphatically contesting the depiction of any and all undeferential women as "bitter," I do agree wholeheartedly with Howe about her "impatient" response to androcentrism and misogyny.

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[147] As Amy Kaplan rightly notes, Wharton's "writing undermines those boundaries between feminine and masculine, private and public, home and business, boundaries which both arise from and collapse into the medium of the market. Yet Wharton's apprenticeship does not leave her at rest in either sphere: as we shall see, she rejects the domestic tradition of the novel by embracing the apparent freedom of the literary marketplace, but there she confronts threatening limits which lead her to revalue

Surrounded by clearly positive moves toward women's suffrage and a range of new occupations opening up, Wharton nonetheless steadfastly resists the optimistic fervour prevalent during the years just before and after 1900:

> Relentlessly she examined the disjunction between popular optimism and the reality as she saw it. Typical women in her view—no matter how privileged, nonconformist, or assertive (indeed, often in proportion to the degree in which they embodied those qualities)—were not free to control their own lives, and that conviction became the foundation of her argument with American optimism for more than twenty years. (Ammons 3)

Not placing any romantic faith in the promised liberation of the day, she declines to provide her readers with a rosy view of the brave new woman. Elizabeth Ammons convincingly devotes an entire monograph, Edith Wharton's Argument with America (1980), to building a case for a writer who could not in good faith subscribe to the hopeful mood of progress where female emancipation was concerned. Her book

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a privatized feminine sphere ultimately in conflict with her model of professional authority" (Kaplan 67).

posits that although Wharton did not produce "a happy, positive story" about women's lives in the U.S. at the dawn of the 20th century, she must not be dismissed as either "reactionary or unconcerned" (Ammons 48). Rather:

> Attuned to and sympathetic with 'the woman question' … , Wharton was quite capable of creating ambitious, lively young women who want to be New Women—who want to perform useful remunerated work in the world and want to be able to choose whether or not to marry, and to retain their individuality if they do. (Ammons 48-49)

Wharton simply did not see "the liberation, the 'progress,' that America boasted of for women" (Ammons 49) and so refused to idealize the notion in her work, and the story of Miss Bart perfectly illustrates this viewpoint. The House of Mirth is profoundly concerned with the issue of women's restricted lives and the undesirability of the unequal, ambiguous relationships to which they are bound. As a "nearly New Woman, [Lily] reveal[s] that the freedom of movement and expression promised to the newly liberated woman remained constrained by the same forces of public censure" (Brooks 108) and social convention that obtained in previous centuries. Her dismal inability to obtain a secure niche within her class (or outside it, for that matter) without accepting a man's patronage and thus his control over her life, or to succeed in any wage-earning occupation, exposes the mirage of plentiful new choices for women. Non-compliance with the time-worn patriarchal rules and conventions proves to lead only to social and economic disaster.

If she is no emblem of modern womanhood, neither is Lily a stereotypically frail and demure 19th-century heroine: her problem is precisely that she hovers in an uncertain sphere created by her inability or refusal to fit tidily into either the paradigm that precedes her or the one that follows. In this way, both novel and heroine are liminal: just as "The House of Mirth … becomes a transition to a new type of fiction. … Lily Bart gives way to the presence of a new generation of women" (Killoran 31-32). From the opening scenes of the novel, when she experiences what Frances Restuccia has rightly called "a feminist moment of lucidity and verbal expression" (Restuccia 226)[148], Lily never ceases to seek a personal solution to a problem publicly imposed by her gender. The sublimely useless, high-maintenance Lily strives for freedom and subjectivity in ways that define her as a self-aware and self-respecting heroine. For example, she does feel entitled to grant herself and her body to the man of her choice or, more importantly, to withhold it. Lily's ambiguous standing, her ultimate loss of position, is "due to corrupt social and economic forces—not a weak or immoral female nature—and [her] 'New' status represents an illusory choice between marriage and poverty" (Brooks 91). Her aspirations, suggested by that seal on the letters she sends, prove her downfall. Patricia Meyer Spacks points out that A Simple Story seeks "to provide images of female freedom. Freedom, in Inchbald's version of things, implies power" (Spacks 197). Nothing in Lily's upbringing allows her to seize power, which is marked masculine and only indirectly accessible, and thus she cannot find freedom. In an unflinching examination of "the pain of being a woman" (Ammons 5), Wharton sardonically mocks any pretence of equal opportunity.

Her point in The House of Mirth is that there is no possibility for the heroine to negotiate a sustainable, unexploitive relationship, and therefore "[w]here there is rebellion it almost always meets with failure" (Ammons 5). The 20th century's much vaunted break from the old gendered codes is at bottom merely an illusion. It is ironic to note that Wharton herself, in real life, managed to acquire a great deal of personal autonomy and lead a remarkably advantaged existence. Her own freedom and control over her life manifest themselves in her many houses (which she took great pride and pleasure in designing and having built, or at least extensively renovated), wide-ranging travels, and a relationship of mutual respect with some of the great literary minds of her time. As one critic comments:

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[148] The reference here is to a conversation Lily has with Selden early in the novel, in which she comments on the difference between men and women: "a girl must [marry], a man may if he chooses" (HM 12).

> Why, then, does she not provide Lily, or any other fictional character, with this 'out,' this alternative space? Perhaps because she felt it to be too privatized and personal a solution to have public currency or fictional viability. (Benert 38-39)

The clear-thinking Wharton, whose attainments were reliant on an independent income and superior intelligence, does not fall into the trap of taking her own privileged situation as representative. Furthermore, the failure of her marriage and the lack of familial support for her work, not to mention several emotional breakdowns in her 20s and 30s, suggest what even a woman with her good fortune had to sacrifice.

A Heroine's Homelessness

In The House of Mirth, the heroine's lack of a material place to call her own once again functions figuratively to indicate a woman's vulnerability to social forces that displace, exploit, and (in this case) ultimately destroy her.[149] I have argued that Ukifune's homelessness in the Genji Monogatari is essential to a full understanding of her liminal nature and its significance: relentlessly shuffled here and there, she occupies increasingly unstable and marginalized places. In Eliduc, Guilliadun leaves behind the safety of her father's castle to run off with her lover, only to find that he is already wed and that she is therefore deprived of any legitimate home. And A Simple Story's Lady Matilda is forced to occupy an isolated suite of rooms in her father's mansion while making it appear that she does not occupy them: her mandated invisibility operating as a stunning metaphor for the humiliating conditions under which too many women live. Lily Bart, likewise, has no "safe private space where [her] female physical and emotional integrity can be preserved" (Brooks 95), whereby Wharton underscores the insidious nature of the systemic disequilibrium that privileges one sex to the great detriment of the other.

The title of this novel is drawn from Ecclesiastes 7:4: "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." By this reference, our author signals her intention to look beneath what on a superficial level appears to be a quite enviable situation. Given that Lily is blessed with high birth and impressive connections, not to mention great beauty and charm, her story should logically be of the happy-ever-after type. However, Wharton uncovers for us the rather dingier reality ("dingy" being one of Lily's favourite terms of disdain): namely, that this picture-perfect princess is in fact strapped for cash, deprived of liberty, neglected by her family, exploited by her friends, dissatisfied with her life overall, and unable to attract the kind of marriage proposal she desires or requires.[150] The system in which this woman has been taught to trust has proven deceptive, if not utterly corrupt and sordid, and she has ceased to believe in it or it in her. Lily has in effect been swindled: she has "been deprived of the financial and emotional supports she has been raised to expect and … even more seriously deprived of the environment for the skills in which she has been trained" (Showalter, "Death of the Lady," 9-10). The familiar structures, all the "things [she] was taught to care for" (HM 221), have been turned upside-down, a classic symptom of the liminal crisis.

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[149] I mentioned earlier that Wharton's first book was a volume on interior design, and would here like to point out that our author's lifelong interest in designing and furnishing domestic spaces is reflected in the importance she accords in her fiction to houses, rooms, and their contents. Lily jokes, for example, that she is sure she would be "a better woman" if she "could only do over [her] aunt's drawing room" (HM 8).

Highlighting her status as a passenger undergoing a rite of passage, Wharton's heroine is always in transit, leading a curiously nomadic existence. (As mentioned in the Introduction, "passenger," along with "liminar," "neophyte," and "initiand" are the terms used interchangeably by van Gennep and Turner to describe the transitional entity undergoing a life crisis.) Increasingly unmoored as the story progresses, Lily ultimately "sw[ings] unsphered in a void of social non-existence" (HM 256). The grand (and not so grand) settings in which she moves are far from neutral since, as Lynne Tillman writes,

> Wharton's enclosures house conflicts and conflicted characters, created not just by ordinary walls. The author constructs walls, limits, that are both real and metaphorical. Wharton's central and most sustained trope, architecture always alludes to Lily's physical or

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[150] More than one critic has characterized this novel as a reverse Cinderella story. On a separate note, one of Edith's childhood nicknames was Lily, which suggests a closer identification with this character and the contrast we see in her between outward appearance and internal strife than might otherwise be understood.

> mental space, her environment or psychological condition. (Tillman 137)

From the cavernous Grand Central Station where the novel opens to the rented room where it closes, The House of Mirth's eternally transitory spaces gradually but ineluctably narrow. The places in which the heroine is displayed to others become ever more squalid, shrinking as her options shrink, until she is finally forced across the threshold because there is no longer any space into which she can fit.

Lily is eternally displaced, awkwardly residing within an imagining of space and society that refuses to recognize her right to self-determination, and unable or unwilling to move on without that recognition and the autonomous position to which it should lead. From earliest childhood, she has never known stability: Lily grew up without any particular attachment to a given place, and in fact recalls only a "turbulent element called home" (HM 28). The family's financial situation alternated erratically between "gray interludes of economy and brilliant reactions of expense" (HM 28), with her mother rushing from here to there on a flurry of social visits and "precipitate trips to Europe" (HM 28) while her father worked himself into an early grave. As an adult, she finds a "longing for shelter and security" (HM 248) increasing as she constantly flees from what a chance reading of Aeschylus' Eumenides has taught her to call the Furies—these are her creditors, of course, but also the growing certainty that time is running out to locate a welcoming place of respite.

As Benert writes, "Vehicles, stairs, thresholds, doorways, connections between private and public life, country and city, operate as occasions for treason. … [These] passageways provide neither shelter nor a wide life but gauntlets of blackmail and betrayal" (Benert 35). Under the care of a relative whose idea of providing for the young woman does not go beyond room and board and occasionally paying her dressmaker's bill, Lily is thoughtlessly left to negotiate these passages alone. She has been deprived of the parental guidance and support necessary both "to certify and safeguard her (reputation for) virtue" (Brooks 101) and to facilitate the important next step in her social progress. As opposed to the case of those merely figurative orphans already discussed, she really has lost both mother and father and thus must fend for herself in the minefield of marriage politics. Lily is fully cognizant of the distinct disadvantage that an absence of familial backing entails, that "she must needs be on the alert for herself" (HM 21). On one occasion, having thrown away yet another opportunity, she muses that

> [t]he cleverest girl may miscalculate where her own interests are concerned, may yield too much at one moment and withdraw too far at the next: it takes a mother's unerring vigilance and foresight to land her daughters safely in the arms of wealth and suitability. (HM 90)

Rung by rung, Lily finds herself descending the ladder of success. Although every time "she slipped she recovered her footing, … afterward … she was aware of having recovered in each time on a slightly lower level" (HM 257). Ladders are, it should go without saying, as liminal as bridges, boats, or staircases, of which we have already come across examples in the Genji Monogatari, Eliduc, and A Simple Story.

This marriageable young woman desperately wants to be able to relax and finally let down her guard, secure in the knowledge of comfort and protection. Why then does she throw away chance after chance to have it over and done with? By means of Lilly's innovative "book-long oscillation" (Restuccia 233)—she appears to be holding out for something that has yet to be offered her and, as it turns out, never will—Wharton's novel urges readers to interrogate the normative organization of the genders and their respective privileges. This is a homelessness not, after all, solely imposed by others or by the system, but instead by the heroine's unwillingness to settle for anything less than full subjectivity. It results directly from her own "refus[al of] positions of stability" (Restuccia 233), her "elusiveness, her refusal ever to take a stand" (Restuccia 236), where this would entail debasing and denying her self.

Homelessness is, of course, a sign of more general prohibitions against women—at least those of a certain class—working and thus being able to support themselves. When the refined Miss Silvertons, ruined by their hapless brother's gambling debts, cast about for a way to earn a living, ever-sympathetic Gerty remarks: "Miss Jane reads aloud very nicely, but it's so hard to find anyone who is willing to be read to. And Miss Annie paints a little—" (HM 259). These women are raised to be helpless, provided with virtually no marketable skills. Moreover, in turn-of-the-century America, even in those classes where women did hold remunerative posts, wages were such as to render the living precarious. The charwoman Mrs. Haffen, for example, is forced to resort to blackmail in order to supplement an insufficient income, and the young working women associated with Gerty Farish's Girls' Club are dependent on charity to make ends meet.

Ukifune and Matilda never possess anything to call their own, while Guilliadun gives up everything to follow her lover, and this "sacred poverty" (Turner, Forest, 99) that liminars must experience reappears in The House of Mirth. Virtually penniless, the supposedly upper-class Lily is reliant on handouts and cast-offs from her aunt and others. Her desperate penury contrasts sharply with the conspicuous consumption practiced among her friends. The homelessness of such a heroine within the very lap of luxury creates a quintessential liminal setting: one that is, as mentioned previously, "detached from mundane life and characterized by the presence of ambiguous ideas, monstrous images, … ordeals, humiliations, esoteric and paradoxical instructions …" (Turner, "Universals of Performance," 11). This topsy-turvy state should lead to transformation and a new social status, followed by a welcoming back into the fold, but things are not that simple for Miss Bart (just as they were not for Ukifune, Guilliadun, or Matilda). She has in effect been denied her birthright: Lily's parents left no money to maintain the leisure-class status that she was raised to expect, and her more or less *ad hoc* guardianship arrangement offers no compensatory funding. As for reversing her fortunes through any form of lucrative employment, as a man might do, well, she has no more realistic chance of succeeding at that than do the Miss Silvertons. The disjunction between the opportunities available to men and to women could not be more evident. Lawrence Selden may be poor like Lily is, but his gender automatically accords him important freedoms. He reads, he travels, and he is fully able to support himself in a cozy, well-furnished apartment while still taking time to spend weekends in the country with friends. When Lily is effectively cut out of Mrs. Peniston's will and denied her "long-assured inheritance" (HM 217), the fact that she is never to be allowed self-sufficiency is made absolutely clear. Given the circumstances, therefore, beneath the surface of this chaste and gentle virgin we should not be shocked to glimpse "the hard, money-bitten Lily, always potentially a prostitute" (Nyquist 99).

The disadvantage of Lily's lack of shelter is as much social and personal as it is economic. In a world built on gendered privilege and exclusion, a woman "can not afford either to have, or not to have, a house" (Benert 36). In order to obtain one, since she cannot hope to earn it by her own labour, she must sell herself, and the dilemma has in fact been reduced to that of deciding "among the forms of prostitution and their various grades, from respectable to sordid" (DuPlessis 17). On the other hand, not to have one means doing without the security that buttresses against both physical want and social opprobrium. As Kristina Brooks reminds us,

> the most significant precondition of a 'good,' or protected, reputation is private space. Lack of privacy—in practical terms, the lack of a home of one's own—determines … Lily's loss of control of [her] own objectification. (Brooks 105)

The inexorably homeless Lily is doomed, because her occupation of the liminal is not in the end viable. The transient spaces in which she finds herself are inherently threatening in their ambiguity and instability; the limen was never designed to serve as a permanent refuge and cannot so serve now. Literary conventions lead readers to expect that this woman so obviously born to be a romance heroine will be rescued from Bellomont or another metaphoric castle by a knight in shining armour, and live happily ever after. In truth, far from being carried off to safety and eternal joy, this damsel in distress is thrust into ever more dangerous settings.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis writes of the "claustrophobia" evident in novels such as The House of Mirth, George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, or even Henry James' Portrait of a Lady: "the novelist constructs a world to insist that there are no alternative places to go, no ways of leaving, no other relationships or circles of friends—and judges—than the terrible ones to which the female hero is bound" (DuPlessis 154). Lily's contrarian insistence on remaining metaphorically unhoused, straddling the threshold between the preliminal and postliminal states available to a female hero, functions to protest the gender-marked imprisonment—the "little black prison-house of fears" (HM 63)—imposed by these limited options. As Judith Fryer points out: "[b]ecause social bonding is for Lily physical bondage, while at the same time it is impossible for her to be independent, all spaces available to her are prisonlike" (Fryer, Felicitous Space, 92). Yet choosing not to choose from among them still dooms this heroine: it is "easy enough to despise the world, but decidedly difficult to find any other habitable region" (HM 256).

It is of particular interest that the oppression and blatant double standard she experiences nonetheless have the effect not of humbling Wharton's heroine and bending her to the will of others, but of strengthening her resolve to re-imagine the world in more advantageous terms. Because no one will contrive to rescue her, she must contrive a way to save herself from dangers that include the marriage plot itself. Her stubborn resistance does manage to liberate her from the normative roles that would otherwise disempower, victimize, and corrupt her self. In a daring act of self-assertion, this young woman embraces liminality. After all, a woman desirous of independence may well decide that this option of living on the edge is preferable to all others. Because she can be categorized as neither here nor there, neither rich nor poor, neither girl nor woman, neither virgin innocent nor depraved "whore," Lily Bart always has within herself the possibility of becoming something else. Like Ukifune, Guilliadun, and Matilda, to the degree that she is able to take her fate in her hands, she looks to rewrite it, refusing disadvantageous choices that would appear all but inevitable; sadly, we bear witness as "the geography of the novel gradually excludes Lily" (Benert 35). The liminality of each of these characters encourages the reader to consider what happens to a woman who cannot or will not adapt to the predominant model, and consequently to question how, why, and by whom those "natural" social arrangements are made and enforced.[151]

Une jeune fille à marier

The union, both public and private, symbolized by a wedding "constitutes the most important of the transitions from one social category to another" (van Gennep 116). Lily has already left behind the asexual world of childhood and awaits the rites of incorporation into sexual adulthood that would mark this transition. Such a significant change of status necessarily produces a crisis, which is compounded when the liminar resists the passage and assumption of that new status. It is important to bear in mind that, while Wharton was not among those who believed in doing away with marriage, she had good reasons not to view it as inherently good or unproblematic. In The House of Mirth, it is represented as "an institution built on greed concealing itself as respectability, and functioning on bitterness, jealousy or mere indifference; beneath its precariously maintained surface betrayal and intrigue are rife" (Foster 156-57). Although many years past girlhood, Lily resembles the other heroines previously discussed in that she has yet to advance from the preliminal state of separation (as unattached young woman) to the postliminal stage of entry into adult society (through being sexually linked to a man). While admittedly long past the age of physiological puberty, she remains in the state of metaphorical puberty I mentioned above. Wharton's depiction of the rituals attending pubescence comments ironically on the purported naturalness of these social processes and institutions. Like Jane Eyre and so many other heroines in women-authored romance, Lily is "a model of 'arrested' or 'prolonged' liminality as she tries to transform and then reintegrate herself into society without sacrificing or even compromising her antistructural ideals" (Hennelly 92-93). It has been said that many of "Wharton's female characters dwell and flail about in a troubled, transitional period" (Tillman 144), and this one is no exception. Any freedom the young unmarried woman enjoys with this unusually extended period of courtship proves unsustainable, if not completely illusory. Miss Lily Bart, the girl-who-is-no-longer-a-girl, cannot exist within a structure that requires its females to be readily classifiable.

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[151] Interestingly enough, her beleaguered father is also described in liminal fashion as existing in Lily's memories as only "the hazy outline of a neutral-tinted father [who] filled an indeterminate space between the butler and the man who came to wind the clocks" (HM 28).

Our heroine is fully aware that she will not be allowed to perform the role of single marriageable female indefinitely, because her society is not one that can imagine "possibilities of defining female individuality in terms other than sexual relativity" (Foster 155). Nevertheless, Lily refuses to abandon her undefined position within the liminal phase, unable to move backward and unwilling to move forward.

As Manuel Aguirre helpfully suggests in his discussion of liminality in fairytales, the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky's notion of "retardation" resembles an extension of liminality, whereby the spatial occupation of what should be merely temporal "defamiliarizes" action and thereby reinvests it with "its original value and intensity" (Aguirre, "Phasing of Form," 20). Lily's refusal to progress beyond the in-between state certainly does have the effect of defamiliarizing the common practices surrounding courtship and marriage under patriarchy and thus exposing their true meaning and effect upon women's lives. It forces a reconsideration of the significance that this essential rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood has within a system that denies her agency and strictly limits her choices.

The courtship phase is, we will recall, unavoidably liminal. This period just prior to marriage is also traditionally the moment of greatest power and dominance for women, when their sexual desirability holds men in thrall. In Lily's case, she has clung to that unique status "between childhood and adulthood, between dependency and responsibility, between autonomy and relationship" (Backscheider 21) for over a decade already, and its delights have long since begun to fade. In the previous chapter, we saw how Inchbald has Miss Milner try to make the most of this temporary pre-eminence and then has Lady Matilda meaningfully pause on the verge of giving her answer, leaving both reader and suitor in suspense as to whether she will accept or reject the proposal. Lily, however, is not granted the eternal narrative liminality that Matilda enjoys, but rather does cross a threshold—the ultimate one—from life into death. This neophyte who had perhaps naïvely imagined that she had "the freedom to invert and even subvert the structured value system" (Hennelly 94) has in the end not been allowed to exert this freedom. The temporal suspension that worked so well for Guilliadun in Eliduc proves unsuccessful for Wharton's heroine: no wedded bliss through innovation of marital structures awaits Lily upon what must be her inevitable departure from the threshold. She may not surrender to any man, but there is no place in the social structure for an independent Lily Bart.

The roles offered her have been revealed as fatally impacted by the whims and demands of the male and his complicit representatives, and therefore constitute spaces that do nothing but underscore her dependence and indeterminacy. Again, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, the effect of the stalled rite of passage is to demonstrate that a woman is accorded no right to direct this passage that is of such import to her future. The transition is dependent on those who wield power and thus should be negotiated with extreme caution if the heroine is to entertain any hope of success or even survival. Like the equally stubborn Miss Milner, Lily learns that defiance of patriarchal privilege exacts a severe price. She has, arrogantly or merely foolishly, not behaved with enough circumspection: too many risks have been taken and too many societal rules have been flouted.

Her former friends and acquaintances turn on her (and then turn her out) as a dangerous entity, something potentially polluting to the normative "realm of culturally defined and ordered states and statuses" (Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 8). In order to cope with this threat of pollution, rituals marking the transition stage typically involve symbolic ordeals, trials, new experiences, structural invisibility, and seclusion. Wharton's liminar is subject to a variety of ordeals ideally suited to a romance heroine: relative poverty, the necessity of pretending interest in boring or boorish men, and even the social drudgery of assisting her hostesses with note-writing and so on. Furthermore, she undergoes a grave test of her character: the adulterous letters written by the very much married Bertha that accidentally come into Lily's possession via Mrs. Haffen could so easily resolve the crisis, if she were to make use of them to leverage her social rehabilitation. She is also exposed to a host of unfamiliar experiences. These include no longer being able to trust either her sexual cachet or the gentlemanly restraint of her admirers; finding fewer and fewer ways to avoid having to have recourse to "humiliating contingencies" (HM 96); and exchanging luxurious quarters in millionaires' mansions for a humble rooming-house where noises and cooking smells irritatingly penetrate the walls. She is shunned by her society, which has no recognized place for unmarried virgins past the age of thirty who are not resignedly "mediocre [and] ineffectual" (HM 87), "poor and dingy" (HM 88) like Gerty Farish. Because the "respectable" classes choose not to see the discarded, structurally unhoused woman, she is made especially vulnerable to the more disreputable members of high society, who see her as fair game to be sexually used and abused.

In Lily's expulsion from her social circle, we also have a form of the seclusion site in which liminars are to reside while awaiting the final moment of their passage. In the seedy boarding house of the novel's final scenes, she is certainly "dead to the world" (Turner, Blazing the Trail, 49) and in a state of limbo. She has in truth been an outsider from the start of the novel, having long since abandoned the values of her class. Now, however, demoted with regard to class and perceived moral standing and thus made structurally invisible, she has been ineluctably cast out from the wealthy, fashionable world in which she was born and raised. Her fellow outsider Rosedale is the only one of Lily's former acquaintances who ventures to call on her in this low-status dwelling. He urges Lily to use those infamous letters as a means of re-entering society as his wife. In effect, he suggests they can be used as a form of the sacra, that "arcane knowledge or 'gnosis' obtained in the liminal period" (Turner, Forest of Symbols, 102) that must be communicated in order to allow the neophyte a successful crossing. Lily intuitively knows this to be profane and unworthy of her better instincts and so although she does, in a moment of weakness, make preparations for blackmailing Bertha, she cannot carry through with the plan.

Because Lily rejects this last chance to turn her seclusion site into a womb for a rebirth of some sort (see Turner, Forest of Symbols, 98-99), it must inexorably become a tomb. The boundary crossing that she does achieve is facilitated, in contrast to that which Rosedale urges on her, by a characteristically unsullied sacra: that "word which made all clear" (HM 324) and that remains uncommunicated, although Lawrence Selden claims to receive it from her dying lips. Selden here seems to join the long list of males in female-authored fiction who fail to see women as people in their own right: while he does not have Lily serve as his wife and hostess, he does try to use her as a means of glimpsing for himself transcendental truth. Wharton suggests that the ever-unarticulated word that Lily is to speak to Selden, but never does, is too potent and dangerous to remain anywhere but "on the far edge of thought" (HM 321).[152] Turner reminds us that what is "obtained in the liminal period is felt to change the inmost nature of the neophyte…. It is not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being" (Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 11). It operates as the password required to cross a significant life threshold, the key to a better state beyond that existential liminality that has been imposed upon her. The neophyte thereby "absorb[s] powers" that are by rights to "become active after his [sic] social status has been redefined in the aggregation rites" (Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 11). In this woman's case, however, this word, this gnosis, is employed to pass permanently outside patriarchal society.

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[152] A fascinating link is suggested with Matilda's eternal withholding of her answer to Rushbrook's proposal. Again, we have a woman who does not speak the word which everyone awaits, turning female silence into something that speaks volumes.

There is no clear resolution into a familiar state of being, for the simple fact that Lily's story is intended precisely to challenge what is familiar and socially sanctioned. Accordingly, despite all these trappings of the standard liminar, Lily is not in the end reintegrated into her former society in a new capacity, be it of high status (e.g., as wife) or low (e.g., as fallen woman, kept mistress, or old maid). The transition from girl to woman fails, but how could it be otherwise? The painfully insistent romantic plot line offers her only two choices: to marry or to die. Edith Wharton uses this woman so painstakingly raised to be the perfect trophy wife (to use an anachronistic expression that seems apt here) as a site for discourses about female oppression, subversion, and empowerment. Like my other authors, she literalizes the social indeterminacy of the marriageable female, subverting readerly expectations and revealing the misogynist underpinnings of the entire structure. Wharton is not dishonest enough to allow her heroine a utopic refuge with Selden or anyone else, and so the only possible release from the extended moment of crisis must be the dystopic. Lily's original belief in limitless options—which for several years lulls her into a false sense of security about how many splendid opportunities for settling herself she will have—proves fallacious. If she feared metaphorically ceasing to exist by agreeing to marry, the non-compliant Lily Bart must materially cease to exist in any case. Her resistance is paradoxically successful, however, to the extent that she does not "become once more subject to custom and law" (Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 15) through being forced to abandon her hard-won values and autonomy.

Felicitous social anchorage is available to a woman only via marriage, and that possibility had become rapidly less likely for Miss Bart. Showalter reminds us that the "threshold of thirty [was] established for women by nineteenth-century conventions of 'girlhood' and marriageability" (Showalter, "Death of the Lady," 4). The well-bred Lily, with her carefully nurtured beauty and charm, is fully expected to land a husband in the end. That she does not is a damning condemnation of any system simplistically classifying women as eligible or not. That the lovely and pure Lily Bart falls into the latter category, even though she has been raised only to please, is unutterably perplexing unless we understand that "behind her refusal [to marry] lies a repugnance toward a relationship in which a woman is powerless" (Ammons 35). Ammons rightly describes Wharton as, throughout her long career, "mov[ing] steadily closer to overtly political fiction, narratives that deal directly with the nature and distribution of power along sexual as well as social and economic lines" (Ammons 4). However, even this early novel evinces a concern with the gendered manifestations of power and the damage it inflicts. Lily does not seek any excessive degree of power over others; all she really wants is the freedom to direct her own life and make choices consistent with her self-respect.

Lily's "fatal unmarriageability" (Tillman 153) stems from, as Showalter suggests (Showalter, "Death of the Lady," 7), the fact that because no man has yet spoken for her, she can be spoken of by and to men with impunity. As we saw earlier, being nameable equals being possessable. Lily is subject to demeaning talk, which results in her falling prey to the sexual demands and depredations of a brute like Trenor. The very real devaluation that Lily faces extends far beyond that to which Bertha Dorset ostensibly intends to sentence her, involving as it does the threat of actual physical harm. Bertha acts ruthlessly to have Lily socially ostracized in order that the charade of her own reputation and marriage can be maintained, regardless of the drastic consequences that might result from her actions. By her resistance to the powers that be, Lily has squandered the chivalrous protection of men and the sisterly support of women that should by rights join together to lead girls of the community safely into wedlock. What this story sets out to demonstrate is just how farcical any notion of true chivalry or sisterhood actually is in a patriarchal, phallocentric world.

We might expect that Lily, owing to her dependent and increasingly menacing situation, would necessarily be obliged to fall into line and accept the implicit terms for rehabilitation. However, although she now desperately needs to follow through on her regularly stated plan of becoming some man's wife, "Lily knows that the ladylike barter she must effect would necessitate giving up the little sense of self she possesses, and that is a form of living suicide to which she cannot contract" (Goodman 50). As Turner explains, neophytes are

> divested of their previous habits of thought, feeling, and action. During the liminal period, neophytes are alternately forced and encouraged to

> think about their society, their cosmos and the powers that generate and sustain them. Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection. (Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 14; emphasis in the original)

During her eleven years playing that role of "jeune fille à marier," Lily has certainly had ample time to reflect on the moral compromises that any relationship with a man would likely demand of her. Her response is to act as an agent of protest through literalizing female disenfranchisement and embracing instead an alternate fate.

As the Introduction to the English translation of The Rites of Passage claims, van Gennep's "analysis of rites of incorporation is valid for understanding the problems associated with the 'alienated' and the 'unclaimed' of modern societies" (Kimball x). An unmarried orphan pushing thirty, Lily certainly qualifies as unclaimed. Furthermore, if Catherine A. McKinnon is correct that "[s]exuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism: that which is most one's own, yet most taken away" (McKinnon 1), then Wharton's heroine is also, and doubly, alienated. Raised to serve as a purely decorative object for the pleasure of others, Lily has been allowed neither remunerative work nor adult sexuality. A beautiful woman who knows just how to display her charms to full effect, Lily inspires arousal in the men around her, but she does not herself experience desire, normally shrinking from any physical contact at all. The one scene in which she does act on anything like a sexual impulse—exchanging a single chaste kiss with Selden (see HM 136)—is narrated in a manner such as to highlight its unreal, fantastic quality. Her entire upbringing has been calculated to produce an incomplete human being minus both sexuality and earning potential, so that she is theoretically incapable of ever threatening male hegemony.

The infantilization of women is one of the themes on which Edith Wharton focuses sustained criticism, as her writings frequently address the demeaning and damaging moulds into which women are forced. An oft-cited passage from her French Ways and Their Meaning argues that the Frenchwoman is more "grown-up" than her U.S. counterpart. The former is, she explains, allowed and even encouraged to converse intelligently with men and serve as her husband's partner rather than a mere dependent incapable of making any contribution beyond childbearing and routine housekeeping. In a scathing comparison of Americans' failure to accord agency to women with what she views as the more vastly enlightened attitude prevalent in France, Wharton concludes:

> No nation can have grown-up ideas till it has a ruling caste of grown-up men and women; and it is possible to have a ruling caste of grown-up men and women only in a civilisation where the power of each sex is balanced by that of the other. (Wharton, French Ways, 113)

Wolff states baldly that "Lily Bart is not a viable adult" (Wolff 136), that she is not equipped to survive in any of the roles open to grown women. Lily does seek a more equitable, mature role, but finds no way to achieve or conceptualize it. This is not just because the men in her circle are misogynist, but more importantly because she has been trained precisely not to see herself as any man's equal. She has instead been brought up exclusively to be an ornament, a collector's item, the personification of aestheticized feminine uselessness. Fryer reminds us that

> We know from French Ways and Their Meaning, A Backward Glance and The Custom of the Country that Wharton valued not a separate world of women, but a world in which men and women intermingled …. We know from The House of Mirth that the elevation of woman to deity on the one hand and her diminution to child on the other produced the same result: permanent residence in 'the valley of childish things.' (Fryer, Felicitous Space, 139-40)

Again, the concept of separate spheres for men and women is revealed to be fraudulent and harmful to both.

Simple, powerless creatures require a guide, and Lawrence Selden appears perfectly suited to this role. In offering up a handsome, charming young man with whom her heroine clearly shares an affinity and by whom she is educated as to a better way of living, Wharton toys ironically with the reader. We are "made to hope that with the aid of her mentor the heroine will raise herself, will transcend her debased femininity and enter his promised land" (Nyquist 86). If this were a straightforward romantic tale, he and Lily would surely marry, but our author turns such idealized expectations on their head with a decidedly unromantic twist. Wharton once explained in a letter to her friend Sara Norton that Selden functions as "a negative hero" (qtd. in Wolff 111). He exhibits "moral shabbiness" and an "essential cowardice and unreliability" (Foster 159), and is almost as guilty of "psychic blackmail" (Castle 323) as Inchbald's Lord Elmwood is. Selden's self-righteous claim to moral superiority and perceived right to judge Lily against his ideal of the "republic of the spirit" (HM 67) are disingenuous. Placing unreasonable demands upon Lily, criticizing and at times dictating her behaviour, he selfishly offers nothing in exchange and does not have the courage of his convictions. This is a recurrent motif in women's writing of the courtship narrative that should by now be familiar to my readers. Kaoru proves excessively vacillating and Niou irresponsibly self-centred; Eliduc reveals a fundamental weakness in his inability to make a decision; and Dorriforth/Elmwood is shown to be arbitrary and pitifully self-deceptive. In Wharton's fiction as well, one looks in vain for a strong, decisive, or wholly admirable male character, as a book by David Holbrook bluntly titled Edith Wharton and the Unsatisfactory Man makes evident.

Lily's too-long unmarried status leaves her vulnerable on several levels: as Joslin points out, "[i]ronically, the source of her power, her sexuality, places her in a powerless situation" (Joslin 59). As a beautiful, accomplished, and vital female, Miss Bart is a dangerous element threatening the stability of the system of power and wealth controlled by men and so must be kept under tight rein, fixed within a carefully delineated social role under the strict supervision of a husband and his family. The freedoms Lily wants to take for granted cause consternation. She is, for instance, roundly criticized for displaying her body in revealing drapery during the tableaux vivants performed at the Wellington Bry's party: in other words, for revealing that she knows her power as a sexually desirable woman. Wharton is employing irony to show how men like the disapproving Jack Stepney completely miss the point—ever since entering puberty, Lily has very much been made to "stand … up at auction" (HM 155) and her sexuality is the most significant part of her value, the very product she is obliged to market and sell. Over the course of this story, this heroine seizes ownership of her commodity status, using it deliberately to manipulate men and even almost throwing it in their faces, rendering the implicit trade in female flesh explicit. This sets a dangerous mood, and sure enough Trenor sees her daring as aggravation enough to justify sexual assault.

Lily Bart is "an outsider [with] a view of the world different from one who functions happily and successfully within it. … She …, inevitably, is a symbol of what her society cannot accept, and a danger to those within it" (Wershoven 16). However, it is actually through playing strictly by the rules that she is at her most subversive. Lily may refuse to provide the expected female response of accepting a husband, but she does so paradoxically by over-performing other aspects of socially constructed femininity such as reticence and a lack of supposedly rational, decisive action. Pliable femininity thereby "metamorphoses into a strength" (Restuccia 224). All of my heroines are nonassertive and docile only on the surface, beneath the tractable demeanour lies a distinct stubbornness:

> In fact Lily has merely learned to suppress and camouflage her own impulses and ambitions. Even though she acquits herself of the social arts in which she has been so carefully bred, she transgresses other moral and social regulations with which society expects compliance. … Her behavior is nonconformist, as are her real ambitions. …she wants to escape—she wants to govern her own course in life. (Ammons 32)

No one else pays the truly civilized behaviours and traditions so important to Lily any more than lip service, and therefore the actions that express her inmost values (e.g., repayment of Trenor's "loan"; refusal to marry for purely mercenary reasons; and balking at the chance to slander Bertha for direct personal gain) make her out within her social group as a threat to the status quo.

Any challenge to hegemonic power must be made with the utmost caution. In a subtle critique of the unfairly dichotomous structure of her world, whereby a morally faultless young woman is classified as guilty and taboo, based solely on misleading appearances, groundless innuendo, and her own innocent striving for liberty, Lily opts to occupy the very limen that has defined her limited options, reinventing it as a space of empowerment. While this woman's moment of decision remains suspended, she is effectively freed from being contained within or excluded from categories defined and controlled by others. It is hinted that there are possibilities for marital bliss between Lily and Selden, but Wharton deliberately avoids that facile conclusion and brings matters to a close without offering any romantic resolution, insisting that this independent heroine must cross her personal and ethical threshold alone. The conclusion to The House of Mirth masterfully blends "the tragic and the enabling. Unsought by the heroine[…], th[is] ending[… is] not unwelcome to those who desire more for heroines than marriage" (MacMaster 222). The significant, over-determined intersection of liminality and femininity with which the entire novel is concerned explicates its message.

The Crisis of the Threshold

It is of significant interest that Edith Wharton describes experiencing what has been called her own "crisis of the threshold" (Wolff 307). In A Feast of Words, Wolff cites an episode from the unpublished “Life and I” (a manuscript that likely served as an early draft for the autobiography that did appear in 1934), where the adolescent Edith Jones finds herself trembling on the doorstep to her own family home. Wolff considers this memory “immensely suggestive,” as do I:

> the most intense moment of agony, as she [Wharton] describes it, always occurred ‘while I waited on the door-step for the door to be opened … and I was a ‘young lady’ with long skirts and my hair up before my heart ceased to beat with fear if I had to stand for half a minute on a door-step!’ (Wolff 39)

This physical threshold is interpreted metaphorically by Wolff as dividing the mother’s realm, i.e., that of an unsympathetic parent and all the mechanisms of gendered rigidity and oppression for which she may have stood, from “all the world outside[, which] was freedom and independence” (Wolff 39). As the young Edith sensed, thresholds equal exposure as much as opportunity, and they demand choices that often entail dire personal and psychological risk. She would go on to create the character of Lily Bart, who reveals that so long as women are socially constructed as intrinsically liminal entities, possessing only relational and thus always provisional status, they will never be free from fear and dependency. As Benstock insightfully suggests:

> Lily is not merely a victim of society’s will, nor are its mores entirely external to her sensibilities. She herself represents the contested terrain of human subjectivity in which powerful social forces vie for dominance and distinction. (Benstock, “Critical History,” 319)

In other words, Wharton's heroine embodies the space between, implicated in and besieged by what is on either side of that doorstep.

As mentioned earlier, Victor Turner convincingly explains that liminality, "as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, … can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values or axioms of the culture in which it occurs" (Turner, Ritual Process, 167). I have throughout this dissertation demonstrated how such scrutinizing of the prevailing cultural ideals and operations is precisely the objective of my authors' employment of the boundary. Wharton's own stated project was to critique the "central values" of what she characterizes specifically as a frivolous culture, but which is also clearly a misogynist one. Lily Bart has no opportunity to craft her own destiny, and it is the prejudicial axioms by which her community judges its female members that are at fault. She struggles valiantly against gender-inflected restrictions "with her impulsive transgressions against her 'fate' of marriage" (Brooks 104), but must confront firmly entrenched "normality." Wai-Chee Dimock's seminal article offering a Marxist critique of this novel points out that "Lily's 'rebellion,' in its very feebleness and limitation, attests to the frightening power of the marketplace" (Dimock 376). Identified as object rather than subject, forced to market her sexuality yet condemned for doing so, our heroine not illogically seeks another way.

From start to finish, liminal Lily exists betwixt and between all of the established social roles, and this characterization is paralleled by the movement of the plot. As critics such as Benert remind us about The House of Mirth as a whole, "[a]n analysis of the novel's patterns of action shows that the turning points occur neither in the open air nor in crowded rooms, but literally on the nodes and, even more often, the margins between them" (Benert 35). Because her ideals and "theory of values" (HM 258) conflict with those of the patriarchal structure within which she is trapped, "Lily feels herself to be 'mere spin-drift of the whirling surface of existence' [(HM 314)], that is, neither inside nor outside but nowhere" (Benert 27). Lily is in the end fundamentally unwilling to consummate the transition for which she has been raised and unable to take advantage of the groundwork that has been so carefully laid. Marriage tantalizingly dangles very real gains, both social and financial, before Lily, but these are outweighed by the concomitant personal and ethical losses. She shrinks from prostituting herself, even to the innocuous degree of buying Rosedale's silence about her unchaperoned visit to a man's apartment by allowing him to accompany her to the train station (i.e., being seen in public with eminently fashionable Lily Bart would greatly advance an outsider's prestige), to give but one example.

In a failed bid to reinvent herself and her choices, Lily becomes increasingly shop-worn, her worth on the marriage market declining ever more dramatically and irreversibly each year. Because she does not want to be reintegrated under the established, disadvantaging order and yet finds no other avenues open to her, she hesitates and risks being lost. Having overstepped the confines allotted respectable young girls, not by immoral acts but by the simple, inescapable fact that she is no longer exactly a girl but has not assumed the status of married woman, our heroine becomes by definition suspect and vulnerable to social opprobrium. It should be underscored that the patriarchy has a vested interest in rushing women through the liminal phase (where they may be dangerously beyond control) into marriage or, if that fails, the murky depths represented by the fallen woman.[153] Like Guilliadun, Lily is no longer safely recognized as virginal and thus of value: those around her intimate quite clearly that her purity—the one asset a "jeune fille à marier" absolutely must possess[154]—has been sullied. People no longer scruple to bandy her name about, and Lily is astute enough to know that it matters not whether what is said has any foundation in truth. That a woman has done nothing of which to be ashamed is, she recognizes, irrelevant in the face of what people may find more convenient to believe. Merely to be spoken about dooms her,[155] and there is no defence that would not damn her more irrevocably. I have already drawn attention to the significance of feminine self-silencing in the three other works discussed, and this theme recurs here as well: "Lily's code of conduct as a lady … bars her from speaking openly about scandals, even to clear her own name" (MacMaster 220). Accordingly, she must trust to time and either the eventual emergence of the irrefutable truth or the simple dulling of collective memory to resurrect her reputation.

Wharton constructs her novel wholly around Lily in media limen—we catch precious few glimpses of this character in the preliminal phase (i.e., as a child), and the story closes upon her passage into the postliminal (i.e., as a corpse). While the assumption has been that she is only momentarily awaiting conferral of the status of wife—be it to an Italian prince, an English earl, or even a Percy Gryce, whose vast wealth devolves from "the fortune the late Mr. Gryce had made out of a patent device for excluding fresh air from hotels" (HM 22)—the period of liminality inexplicably drags on. During the time she remains eligible for marriage, a girl is, socially speaking, neither this nor that. The resulting loss of status that the liminar experiences while within that transitional space should be inconsequential, as the normal reward for surviving the rite of passage is an ostensibly permanent and higher status. With sophisticated nuance, Wharton shows that women are never truly accorded anything but the most precarious status. Lily's insistently liminal existence leaves us all betwixt and between, denied any closure other than the indeterminate one of a suicide that is not a suicide (again, we see similarities to my earlier discussion of the Genji's final heroine). While neither pleasure nor comfort is to be found in the ambiguity and uncertainty of being neither here nor there, liminality does at least allow the hint of a reconceptualization of oneself outside the constraints and limiting parameters defining social inclusion and exclusion. Lily's dilemma is certainly on one level the result of her upbringing and behaviour, but on another, more meaningful level it signals the existential difficulty faced by all women caught in this stranglehold. Patriarchal law "condemns and destroys Lily, [as] the inevitable result of her trying to step outside it" (Restuccia 238), and does so to others as well.

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[153] Further, as Wershoven explains with examples drawn from several Wharton novels, women are eternally vulnerable to falling, or possibly being forced to flee, into that lower status: "But it is very easy for a woman to cross the boundaries into the bleak world of social disapproval or even ostracism. Some women, such as Ellen Olenska or Nan St. George, do so deliberately, unable to endure the suffocation of an unhappy marriage and desperate for freedom. Others do not, at first, deliberately violate or challenge society's dictates, but instead simply fail to become the standard marriageable product. Such women are Lily Bart, whose lack of a dowry and of respect for the marriage game itself spoils her chances, and Mattie Silver, whose extreme poverty makes it difficult for her to find a man who will take her" (Wershoven, Intruder, 16).

[154] Kristina Brooks points out (as many critics have done) that the flower for which Lily is names is the symbol of purity, and notes that although it had been "somewhat 'denaturalized'" by the time Wharton was writing this novel, "the purity standard still marked a boundary between the good and the bad, the fortunate and unfortunate, woman" (Brooks 93).

[155] As an interesting aside, Lucretia Jones seems to have taken to a surprising extreme the idea that no respectable woman should be named publicly: the space for the mother's name was left blank on the baptismal birth register for Edith and her brothers (see Lewis 5-6).

Any boundary defiance by a woman, even when relatively innocuous, places her in metaphorical if not material danger. Examples of Lily's defiance of the limitations circumscribing an unmarried woman's actions include drinking a cup of tea with Selden in his rooms, smoking cigarettes, playing bridge for money, allowing a married man to speculate on her behalf, and adopting a risqué costume to perform in the tableaux vivants. The peril is all out of proportion:

> The society of The House of Mirth either forces women into its limited slots or rejects them. Lily's suppleness, her indefiniteness, protects her from being forced in, so she is tossed out. But while we may take pleasure and pride in the purity of Lily's rebellion against masterliness, death is obviously an exorbitant price to pay" (Restuccia 236).

As Wolff reminds us, no simplistic or comedic closure is possible: "within the House of Mirth there is no alternative; and both Lily and Selden are too thoroughly acclimated to live elsewhere" (qtd. in Wolff 125). The essentially (tragically) innocent nature of her boundary defiance cannot be overstated: Lily never breaks any laws or violates any but the most superficial of behavioural standards. Furthermore, in the particular subset in which she moves, these standards are already being honoured more in the breach than in the observance. The virtually unerringly ladylike instincts on which she relies highlight the obverse arbitrariness of the rules imprisoning women. There is no need for her to commit adultery or accept money in exchange for sex; in order to be socially vilified and expelled all Lily really has to do is drop by Selden's flat and chat idly about books. And let us note in passing that Wharton's irony extends to the fact that her heroine does not even claim the right to read these books, far less to write them, but merely restricts herself to admiring their bindings (i.e., their role as aesthetic objects worthy of collecting, just like herself) and being taught by a man the significance they have to and among men, who remain the recognized owners and authors.

As has been suggested above, material thresholds are omnipresent in this story as well, especially connected with the pivotal moments of Lily's life: "all the crucial events occur in the transitional spaces, on the stairs and thresholds, in the trains and carriages, that mark the nodes and margins between city and country, public and private, outside and inside" (Benert 27). Slipping out of Selden's apartment, she runs into Rosedale and must endure his innuendo, and this just after having had to squeeze past a suspicious charwoman on the staircase (I have already explained how stairs function symbolically as a vertical threshold). Later, Selden himself catches sight of her in Gus Trenor's doorway, and deciding—again immediately and based on only circumstantial evidence—that she is utterly compromised, flees the country and abandons her to face scathing rumour all alone. Moreover, it is while living on the Dorsets' yacht that Lily is fatally insulted by Bertha and, like the boat aboard which Guilliadun learns of her lover's treachery, the setting clearly symbolizes a dangerously liminal space. Other, more minor incidents abound, including Lily's thoughtful pausing as she climbs the stairs at Bellomont and observes below her the glittering world to which she does not quite belong and yet to which she is chained.

Lily's life is public where she would prefer discretion and privacy, and what is increasingly made public is her problematic in-between-ness. At the pivotal moment in the story, when she is discovered on that doorstep with Trenor at a time when everyone knows his wife is away, "[h]er provisional presence, not inside, not outside, endangers her" (Tillman 139). (As an aside, it should not pass without comment that during the crisis scene of the attempted rape, the terms "threshold and "door-step" appear at least seven times in as many pages.) This threat of exposure becomes increasingly ominous throughout The House of Mirth. Ruth Yeazell, for example, reminds us how Lily's "slightest deviation from propriety seems guaranteed to turn the anonymous streets of the modern city into the oppressively close byways of an inquisitive small town" (Yeazell 16). In a more general sense, then, a woman like Lily cannot survive because she is at home in neither Victorian narrowness nor modern expansiveness. Tillman expresses the problem as follows: "Lily contains within her traces and pieces of the old order and longings for the new, Wharton drops Lily between the two worlds, on the frontier, where no place is home or safe" (Tillman 140). The unpredictable quicksand of ever-shifting rules that are to govern her behaviour and safeguard her passage turn deadly in their contradictory demands: "[c]aught between the imperative to display herself and the injunction to keep herself modestly out of sight, Lily dies, one might say, partly because she lives in both Veblen's city and Mrs. Peniston's" (Yeazell 34).

The reference here is to Thorstein Veblen's famous study entitled The Theory of the Leisure Class (published six years before The House of Mirth), which analyzes with intelligent and biting commentary the class and times of which Lily is a part. He points out that

> woman's life, in its civil, economic, and social bearing, is essentially and normally a vicarious life, the merit or demerit of which is, in the nature of things, to be imputed to some other individual who stands in some relation of ownership or tutelage to the woman. (Veblen 229)

Although his intention is not to focus on female lives or the struggle for emancipation, Veblen does provide useful insights into women's standing vis-à-vis men. Describing the wife as "still primarily a servant," he writes:

> In order to satisfy the requirements of the leisure-class scheme of life, the servant should show not only an attitude of subservience, but also the effects of special training and practice in subservience. The servant or wife should not only perform certain offices and show a servile disposition, but it is quite as imperative that they should show an acquired facility in the tactics of subservience—a trained conformity to the canons of effectual and conspicuous subservience. Even today it is this aptitude and acquired skill in the formal manifestation of the servile relation that constituted the chief elements of utility in our highly paid servants, as well as one of the chief ornaments of the well-bred housewife. (Veblen 56)

The term "subservience" on which this economist and sociologist so strongly insists in these sentences is defined elsewhere in his book as "an economic relation conceived in personal terms" (Veblen 222). This is an apt description of what Lily Bart finds abhorrent.

Lily is not remotely suited to fill a marginal role, as a homely do-gooder like Gerty, for instance; if she cannot be married off or made to serve as mistress to a powerful man, then she must die.[156] We must take the author's choices seriously: "It was Wharton's novel; within broad limits she could have chosen any fate for her heroine, and she chose to kill her. That choice implies a judgment upon the elements of femininity that Lily embodies: they are not viable, not worth preserving" (Wolff 136). Or is it rather that, insofar as Lily's inherent femininity is pure and uncorrupted and true, these qualities are indeed worth preserving but simply cannot be in this environment? Reintegration requires equivocation, and her efforts at adapting or transforming herself to meet the expectations of her circle are half-hearted at best. Each time the crisis comes to a head, Lily finds that the effort is simply not worth it, the cost too high; her postliminal destination is not to be the social stratosphere peopled by the wealthy and the powerful. Goodman rightly ranks The House of Mirth among Wharton's "bleakest books," whose "most repeated symbols reflect her analysis: the frozen tableaus, enchaining adornments, stifling veils, unvoiced words, and the precarious thresholds that lead to rooms of all types—dangerous, lonely, and locked" (Goodman 8). Even though the only way successfully to slip the clutches of the oppressive normative structure is through death, Lily must resist.

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[156] Interestingly enough, one of the lais authored by Marie de France (i.e., Chaitivel) to which I made reference in Chapter Two tells the story of a heroine who tries to extend the courtship phase in order to avoid having to make a final choice among several suitors. In that case, it is all the suitors but

Unwilling to accept the limited and compromising roles offered her, this young woman has no choice but to descend into social oblivion. The irony is that she, like all women under patriarchy, has always held only a tenuous place within society, subject to masculine whim and favour. Again like Ukifune, Guilliadun, and Matilda, Lily has enjoyed the physical comforts of the elite but does not possess the security that a legitimate, unambiguous social standing is presumed to allow. The very existence of these liminal heroines implies a profound questioning of the legitimacy

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one who die, leaving the young woman to mourn their loss and regret her unwillingness to accept any of them and thereby a normative postliminal state.

of male privilege, of women as justifiably subject to masculine exploitation and nullification. These erstwhile victims of the attempt to discount women's agency make innovative use of their imposed liminality and the submissive posture they are obligated to assume, rendering themselves more uncannily liminal than the patriarchal forces had originally intended. According to Frances L. Restuccia, Wharton suggests that any

> firm position is unattractively masterful, and not female (or feminine), and that the suppleness even of indecision is preferable to the phallogocentrism demonstrated in The House of Mirth by one male suitor after another who attempts to capture, crystallize, or define Lily Bart. (Restuccia 224)

A woman's liminality is transformed into one that is now subversively under her own control and therefore a strategy for female resistance and empowerment, but of course Lily's story ends in death by her own hand. Rendered as good as dead to her social circle, that beautiful body that has been hitherto preened and packaged as an artificial object for universal admiration and desire finally ends as a corpse. This performance of death makes her presence intrude insistently upon the centre in a way the living, breathing Lily was unable to do, as Gus and Bertha will have to come to terms with her posthumous cheque for $9,000, and others to revise their verdict of a self-consciously undefineable Lily Bart. Whereas in life she was silent, as a lady necessarily should be, Lily is finally from the silence of the tomb able to make a statement that is loud and clear.

Wharton's liminal encoding, similarly to that employed by Murasaki Shikibu, Marie de France, and Elizabeth Inchbald, proves a highly effective means of critiquing the damaging nature of rigid social dichotomies and a systemic imbalance of power. Those old gendered polarities have governed Lily's life: male/female, active/passive, powerful/weak, intellect/body, and so on, but by refusing to acquiesce to the established rules and/or roles, she is able to challenge a patriarchal hegemony that ascribes women only the disempowered secondary position. Although she ultimately fails to create a sustainable third space, or locate or create an acceptable postliminal space for herself among the living, this very "striving after new forms and structures" (Turner, "Universals," 12) serves a useful, revolutionary purpose. It undermines the negative valuation of the feminine that Lily has been so perfectly trained to personify. In this way, Wharton powerfully reveals the inadequacies and deficiencies of an androcentric system, with its bonds of unequal dualism, and suggests that alternatives should, but apparently will not, be made available.

I have already demonstrated how liminality is normally conceived of as "in the subjunctive mood," opening up "[a] whole world of wishes and hopes" (Turner, "Performative Genres," 38). While for Lily this condition turns into a living nightmare, it is less of a nightmare than marriage to Gryce, and considerably less than an illegitimate relationship with Trenor would be. Although Lily cannot help but view a rejection of marriage-as-concubinage as the only way to preserve her dignity and self-respect, this becomes increasingly difficult. The transient "jeune fille à marier" state where she enjoys a form of independence and power and that she thus prolongs ultimately becomes the cause for ever greater poverty, ever worsening living conditions, ever dwindling numbers of friends and supporters, and an ever increasing craving for the repose and shelter (both real and figurative) that she has been denied. It is not in the interests of the patriarchal power structure to allow women to exist independently outside a marital or other relationship with a man. Wolff argues that "what thresholds meant to Edith Wharton long ago" was the understanding that there were "two distinct worlds … the world of adulthood, independence, freedom, and sexual maturity; and the world of childhood, obedience, limitation, and emotional starvation" (Wolff 173). For Lily Bart, neither childhood nor adulthood holds out any promise: the social structure simply offers too limited a range of choices to someone like her, and presumably, to all women.

A Moment's Ornament

The liminal space as imagined by Lily and my other heroines exposes the arbitrary nature of those gendered binaries that appear to structure society in a "normal," "natural," or "inevitable" manner. What we see in this text is yet another example of what might be called strategic femininity, to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak: namely, the conscious, volitional employment of the very features that are used to oppress and victimize women.[157] Just as Ukifune's submission to the repeated pattern of concealment and exposure gradually evolves into a self-concealment; just as Guilliadun uses fainting and self-silencing in order to get her way; and just as Matilda adopts a hyper-submissive posture as her sole means to resist erasure; Lily also paradoxically makes use of imposed standards of femininity to circumvent the social standards that would exploit her. Hers is a world where women are trained to be "parasitic" and "can only make their wishes known by practicing what Veblen calls 'the tactics of subservience'" (Gilbert and Gubar, No Man's Land, 146). Lily has certainly an "acquired facility" (Veblen 56) in just such stratagems, which are the direct "effects of [her] special training and practice" (Veblen 56), and it is fascinating to watch as her highly successful performance of femininity incisively challenges the imposition of dependency.

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[157] Spivak's notion of "strategic essentialism," a critical stance intended to lead to interrogation of essentialist terms and attitudes, involves the co-opting of otherwise detrimental positions as a means of ultimately achieving positive social action.

Unable to revolt more openly, Lily balances precariously between apparent deference and a will to have a fuller, more meaningful existence. Like countless female characters in romance, she would like to believe that a beautiful and charming young woman can make her own rules, and this belief is what emboldens Wharton's heroine to delay for over a decade accepting an unattractive bargain. Tractable where the stakes are not high (i.e., she is not needlessly self-destructive—the length of time that she is able to remain within the liminal stage is evidence of her strong desire to survive), Lily does offer firm and resolute resistance where it matters, even when she knows the cost of voicing dissent. Lily's mother had taught her always to regard herself as special, as destined for something better than that to which everyone else, especially those who "live like pigs" (HM 30), tamely submits. Although she never strays into the immorality practiced (and immediately regretted) by Inchbald's first heroine, Lily does exceed certain socially demarcated limits. As DuPlessis neatly remarks, she is "too daring for stolidness, yet too scrupulous for some of the more sordid exchanges of love and money in which she is, nonetheless, partially implicated" (DuPlessis 16). The image of this woman in limbo, progressively made to disappear from the only world she has ever known, powerfully negotiates with gender hierarchies and their misogynistic foundations.

The use of liminal imagery by all of my authors encourages the reader to question the prevailing distribution of power and its human costs. Through literalization of an inconvenient female's occupation of the threshold, the prejudicial social order and its harmful underlying gender binaries can be challenged. Neophytes find themselves in a unique position of freedom, albeit qualified and temporary freedom, from rigid roles and structures. As Turner writes, they are often considered to be connected "with deity or with superhumanan power, with what is, in fact, often regarded as the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless" (Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 8) and so a hesitation to leave this stage behind is far from inexplicable. By remaining betwixt and between, transforming the finite period of puberty into something almost infinite, the persistent Lily denies others the right to bind and limit her in any way. Determined to find less exploitive configurations of power, as she finds herself becoming more and more obviously associated with an undefined and therefore hazardous social position, Lily wrests a certain amount of self-determination from the liminal status. Her refusal to transgress what she knows to be the bounds of a true lady's behaviour (e.g., not dignifying insults by responding and not marrying for financial gain alone) paradoxically leads others to assume that she has bartered sexual favours for money or at least become involved with married men. The effects of this muted, intensely personal rebellion are far-reaching: as the presence of a woman who stubbornly does not fit the paradigm gradually exposes as unnecessary and wrongful the myriad restrictions placed on the psychological and social development of women.

The original title for this novel was A Moment's Ornament,[158] highlighting such themes as the short-lived autonomy allowed to a desirable and as yet unattached young woman, the transience of her value on the market, and the decorative role she is assigned. As I have already indicated, one of the central scenes is that of the tableaux vivants, occurring immediately before Lily's frightening encounter with Trenor. In a tableau vivant, famous paintings (e.g., by Botticelli, Goya, Vandyke, or Watteau) are staged before an audience, offering "to the responsive fancy … magic glimpses of the boundary world between fact and imagination" (HM 132). Thomas Loebel defines this once popular form of spectacle as "threshold structures dependent upon the blurring of the boundaries between art and life, and between what is seen and what is made intelligible" (Loebel 117-18). Based on my reading of The House of Mirth and its liminality motifs, the fact that Lily experiences not only her greatest triumph but also the simultaneous triggering of her final downfall by virtue of the starring role she plays in this "boundary world" or "threshold structure" is highly meaningful.[159]

The performers in a "living image" bodily enact classical works, posing silent and motionless as they efface themselves into the imagery set by a long-dead artist. The narrator of this story explains that Lily's companions so "skillfully … subdued" their personalities

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[158] The phrase is taken from a Wordsworth poem, "She Was a Phantom of Delight": "She was a phantom of delight/ When first she gleamed upon my sight; / A lovely Apparition, sent / To be a moment's ornament." The poet describes this hauntingly beautiful apparition, and expresses his surprise at finding her to be flesh and blood: "A Spirit, yet a Woman, Too!" (Hutchinson 148).

[159] For a more detailed, and fascinating, account of tableaux vivants and their risqué, if not scandalous, associations and history, see Fryer, "Reading Mrs. Lloyd," especially pp. 29-31.

> to the scenes they figured in that even the least imaginative of the audience must have felt a thrill of contrast when the curtain suddenly parted on a picture which was simply and undisguisedly the portrait of Miss Bart. (HM 132)

Lily has chosen to portray Joshua Reynolds' "Mrs Lloyd" but, ever the contrarian, displays her own artistry rather than meekly serving as the medium for someone else's vision.[160] This highly aestheticized woman simply cannot "cease to be herself" (HM 133) and successfully turns an exercise that would appear to demand passive anonymity from its participants into an illustration of the most insistent individuality. When she makes her appearance before the gathering, "Lily alone crosses the boundary between illusion and reality. Miss Bart alone seems not to portray art but to be art" (Waid 28). This is only logical: over-performed femininity on a day-to-day basis has made of her a veritable tableau vivant, in that she has been disciplined to function as a representation of an idealized female rather than as a real live woman. Lily has long known how to embody a work of art in a way no one else can.

Typically, as more than one critic reminds us, liminality "is a profoundly creative and innovative period, whereby society is renewed from within. It is definitively an appropriate site for social … transformation" (Gallego 30). Wharton demonstrates how, where liminality is linked to femininity, it can be depressingly non-transformative. By refusing to allow the female a wider scope, patriarchal society loses any chance at being renewed via her reincorporation, which is what the liminal process is intended to achieve. The potential for innovation and social change that these independent-minded women clearly possess must be thwarted because such female-directed transformation is deeply threatening to the status quo. This failure may be best illustrated by Selden's actions following the tableaux vivants. He and Lily finally kiss, and later that night he writes to request a meeting, intent on finally proposing, only to run away like a coward the very next day. A "rite of passage shapes a dynamic process, and progress, from one state or condition to another" (Aguirre, "Phasing of Form," 13), but for Lily this process ultimately leads to permanent expulsion from her community and life itself, and for her community nowhere at all. The "frivolous society" (Wharton, Backward Glance, 207) to which Lily has belonged and that has "thrown [her] out into the rubbish-heap" (HM 303) will merrily carry on with its selfish and hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, wealth, and the consolidation of power. As Tillman writes so beautifully: "[i]Ironically, undidactically, Wharton teaches that separate isn't equal; difference shouldn't be but usually is hierarchical, and change in any establishment or tradition is, like her sentences, slow" (Tillman 157).

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[160] Reynolds depicts the future Mrs. Lloyd as an as yet unmarried woman, intent on the act of carving her fiancé's initials into a tree and unaware of our gaze.

This heroine represents that which is but which is not supposed to be, a woman who possesses agency and a mind of her own. The House of Mirth has been described as a "cautionary tale … for trapped women, depicting the consequences of an impulsive and undisciplined rebellion against the massed power of the status quo" (Wershoven, "Arrested Development," 28). While I could not agree more with the idea of Wharton delivering a message of caution, Wershoven's implication (although, to be fair, most critics share her interpretation) that Lily is behaving merely impulsively and without discipline is less easy to accept. Others try to imprison Lily "in a projection of male desire, fantasized simplistically in polar terms: angel/monster, virgin/whore, innocent/seductress" (Gabler-Hover and Plate 357), but she is not about to give up without a struggle. By refusing to accept those labels or the notion that others have a right to define the limits within which she has value, Lily exposes the misogynist underpinnings of the system as incompatible with female liberty and autonomy. As choice and self-determination are revealed as illusory, she refuses to perform even the pretense of choosing among the equally undesirable postliminal positions on offer. She declines a disenfranchised, marginal role, and instead effectively makes of her position of ostensible weakness one of strength. This same pattern (with, admittedly, various shifts of emphasis and meaning) is played out through images of liminality in all four texts of women-authored courtship narratives that I have set out to analyze in this dissertation. The liminal allows each heroine to preserve her self from harm, even if, as in Lily's case, she must retreat into death in order to accomplish this. She doesn't passively capitulate any more than Matilda, Guilliadun, or Ukifune do; all of these women demonstrate subversiveness no less real for being played in a minor key.

It should be borne in mind that, as Fryer points out, "Wharton knew a great deal about cultural anthropology. She read Darwin, Huxley, Spencer 'and various popular exponents of the great evolutionary movement,' and she made skillful use of works like The Golden Bough in analyzing her own former world in tribal terms and in dramatizing its rituals" (Fryer, Felicitous Space, 131). The story told in The House of Mirth could not have been specifically informed by Les Rites de Passage, which was not published until 1908. Nevertheless, Miss Lily Bart uncannily follows the very process that van Gennep describes. Like the classic liminar, she separates from the preliminal, undergoes a term of banishment and trial, and finally transitions to the postliminal, but this is far from the triumphant reintegration into society that the reader of traditional romances is taught to expect. In only one of the courtship narratives that I have analyzed does the heroine actually marry, and I have shown that Guilliadun does so only by iconoclastically revising the terms of the marriage contract to create a potentially more favorable dynamic (i.e., a more stable triangular structure is substituted for an unbalanced duality). No such possibility is offered here. If, "[i]n the final scene, Lily lies at the threshold, not just of consciousness and unconsciousness, but of being and beyond" (Loebel 127), the only "beyond" that allows her the peace of mind and autonomy she craves is death. Wharton cannot and will not allow a comforting fairytale conclusion: "[c]aught between terror and comfort, Lily's end is as ambiguous as her beginning" (Benert 37). The failed initiation episode formed by the entire novel exposes the viciousness and arbitrariness of the patriarchal system, laying bare the processes of victimization inherent to its betrothal and marriage practices. Out author "resisted the usual domestic plot of happiness through marriage, yet she remained equally skeptical of the solutions offered by romance. She saw 'Beyond!' beneath a flying ship' as a futile quest" (Joslin 69). But regardless of its undeniable futility, the struggle is not abandoned or shirked. Lily does not die "will"-less (à la Miss Milner) in a pathetic attempt to appease the all-powerful status quo; she quite deliberately settles her own affairs before lying down to an eternal sleep.

Ukifune attempts to drown herself but ends up in a religious retreat where a feigned amnesia allows her to hide away; Guilliadun surrenders consciousness but promptly reawakens once her crisis has been resolved; and Matilda performs non-being only until she is recognized and offered her rightful place in society. Lily, on the contrary, does not undergo a merely metaphorical dying during the liminal phase. One highly relevant article explores what it is about killing off a heroine in the final scene that may prove "enabling for … authors" (MacMaster 217) at the beginning of their careers. Anne MacMaster compares The House of Mirth with Virginia Woolf's The Voyage Out, published ten years later, making the case that both of these women writers use "these initial stories of death on the threshold of development to orchestrate their own continually developing careers and to create female characters who mature beyond the impasses that check the growth of Rachel [Vinrace] and Lily" (MacMaster 218).[161] She argues that a ruthlessness with regard to their heroines' fates allows both Wharton and Woolf to break with nineteenth-century conventions and forge ahead with "re-scripting the feminine in fiction" (MacMaster 217). In so doing, they "negotiate their own ways around the very impasses they depict. Each author, while fixing her heroine forever at an arrested stage of development, fashions herself into a mature author" (MacMaster 219), which involves facing cold, hard reality. Lily's experience of this "arrested stage of development" is not confined to her death: from start to finish, she finds herself forced to make an impossible either/or choice, to which her response is to become neither/nor, embodying the liminal.

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[161] Along the same lines, it is interesting that a contemporary reviewer of The House of Mirth (i.e., in Outlook, dated October 21, 1905) writes that "Mrs. Wharton … has often stood on the threshold of life; now she has entered into its tragic and mysterious secrets" (qtd. in HM xxviii).

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A criticism occasionally leveled at this novel is that of dualist thinking. However, this is due to a shortcoming not in the author but in the social structure itself, namely the ambiguous positions it imposes upon women. Lily's devastating loss of status and her near-rape reveal the socially constructed vulnerability of all of her sex, exposing the misogyny and potential violence that are always hovering just below the elegant, well-mannered surface. I hope to have convincingly demonstrated in this chapter that Lily Bart never ceases the fight to define herself in contradistinction to the disempowered position to which she has been assigned, even though her struggle manifests itself in an apparent helplessness and submission. Whether or not we agree with Ammons that Wharton "sounded a sour, dissenting note" (Ammons 3) to the prevailing atmosphere of optimism regarding female emancipation, she obviously resists any unproblematic, simplistically comforting conclusion. To return to the comparison with Kate Chopin with which I opened this chapter:

> Wharton and Chopin show us women who can wake up, who do step out of the system. But neither writer will entice us into a new and evasive dream … . Instead, both … explore the hazards of rebellion, and, by depicting their heroines' ultimate defeat, define the qualities needed if one is to move 'beyond,' to sail, or swim, with a sense of purpose, to the safe shores of human connection. (Wershoven, "Arrested Development," 39)

Because she is not attached to a man, Lily remains girl/not-girl, lacking any place that is secure and inviolable, far from any safe shore. This ever-liminal heroine is "perpetually in training for the role she never assumes" (Yeazell 23) and as readers we bear witness to her troubled experience of "the phenomena and processes of mid-transition" (Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 18).

This dissertation on liminality motifs in a selection of women's writing has explained how they can be employed very effectively to represent a woman's desire for her future to unfold in less restrictive and oppressive ways. That these female characters are able to remove themselves from the unsustainable situation into which the obligation to enter into unequal relationships with men have drawn them, and are able to occupy a non-space of their own creation, functions as a clear assertion of self-determination. Paying due attention to the numerous boundary images, particularly the insistent embodiment of the limen, to be found in The House of Mirth, allows us to uncover a uniquely powerful encoding of social protest. If Lily "seems dedicated to a certain freedom from definition" (Restuccia 229), it is because accepting an externally imposed definition of adult womanhood would mean the destruction of her self. Where this over-determined role is one that would close off any avenues for independence, a failure to assume it can actually prove beneficial. The liminal phase is supposed to constitute a magical space offering unlimited alternatives, "the possibility … of standing aside not only from one's social position but from all social positions" (Turner, Dramas, 13-14), but the realistic Wharton shows how any refuge it offers from the looming reality of rigid dichotomies can ultimately be only temporary.

Like the heroines dealt with in the three preceding chapters, Lily Bart wages her personal struggle of resistance from a stance of decided liminality, turning her disempowered status as neither child nor woman into a position of power and selfhood, however tenuous and dystopic it proves in the end to be. Lily dies alone and in abject poverty with that mysterious word on her lips rather than compromise herself by means of a mercenary marriage or an act of blackmail. The prevailing paradigm simply cannot tolerate a self-aware, independent heroine. The House of Mirth offers a profound examination of the role of power in human relationships, especially the male-female dynamic, as well as the possibilities for rebellion and self-assertion: "Promise, then, as well as threat, lies in the notion of the border areas, and the possibility of crossover and transgression associated with it" (Messent 63). And it is precisely for the shelter it promises, be it ever so momentary and inevitably doomed, from the annihilation threatened by the representatives of the patriarchal system that Lily Bart clings to an extension of her imposed liminality.

Conclusion

> "Ce n'est que par une comparaison que
> nous connaissons précisément la vérité."
> (Descartes)

Sei Shônagon, Murasaki Shikibu's contemporary, once drew up a list titled "Things That Cannot Be Compared," which begins as follows:

> Summer and winter. Night and day. Rain and sunshine. Youth and age. A person's laughter and his anger. Black and white. Love and hatred. The little indigo plant and the great philodendron. Rain and mist. (Morris, Pillow Book, 81)

As is often the case with this writer, her point is somewhat elusive. However, she appears to be stating that polar opposites (e.g., night and day) are incomparable, but so too are phenomena that are too close to one another (e.g., rain and mist); in any event, each of the items listed deserves full attention as unique and fascinating in and of itself. While the same holds true for the quartet of discrete literary works discussed in this dissertation, I hope to have demonstrated the indisputable value in comparing them nonetheless. By examining a selection of women's fiction from English, French, and Japanese to see how various boundaries are undermined in a bid to destabilize a rigidly dichotomous and oppressive system, this study has highlighted important textual aspects hitherto neglected or underplayed. What my work has shown is that texts and characters emerging from completely separate social, cultural, and historical contexts can indeed be compared, and usefully so, whenever an enabling departure point common to each one can be identified. Provided that the works are "interestingly juxtaposed and studied with care" (Damrosch 299), an approach that purposefully sets them side by side allows for the establishing of highly rewarding connections and insights.

Claudia Brodsky Lacour, analyzing the development of the comparative method in the humanities overall, helpfully brings us back to Goethe and his interdisciplinary work that "compare[d] visible characteristics and thus [saw] what could not be perceived in isolation" (Lacour 272). The admittedly idiosyncratic juxtaposition employed in my doctoral project is intended precisely to uncover characteristics that could not fully be perceived in isolation, and thereby add to our understanding of the multifaceted depth of these authors. Stories engage readers by what they represent, but even more so by how and why they represent it, and the role of a critic is to articulate all of these elements. The original readers of the texts dealt with in this dissertation may not have framed the issues under discussion in precisely the same manner as I have done. However, a close reading of the texts and their thematic affinities reveals a sophisticated awareness of these issues and their significance, and the motif of liminality allows us to uncover meaningful likenesses among women living in patriarchal societies. Dorothy Richardson once wrote: "[b]y their metaphors shall ye know them" (from a letter qtd. in Bronfen 168). It has been my overriding goal to assist readers in getting to know these authors and their work a little more intimately, through the similar figures they repeatedly, and so effectively, employ.

An important objective of this dissertation has been to explode the artificial boundaries of literary studies based on language and nation. The entire project has aligned itself with the more global stance taken by comparatists such as Eva Kushner, who argues that

> comparative literature needs to assume forcefully that the universal is already (and has been all along, in often unanalyzed ways) at work in all literatures; that we are right in the middle of the global village, and that not only do all literatures belong … but none of them intrinsically possesses the supreme key to a hierarchy of formal or ideational values entitling them to discriminate in authoritative ways among or within themselves and among cultures. (Kushner 14)

My discussion has intentionally leapt from Asia to Europe to North America, from the 11th century to the 20th, rejecting any notion of discriminatory hierarchy or that literary analysis must limit itself to a corpus circumscribed by the borderlines of a single country or period. After all, the introduction to The Feminist Companion to Literature in English reminds us that the

> breakdown of the national … is by no means exclusively a recent occurrence: Marie de France apparently came from France and wrote in England; Christine de Pizan came from Venice and wrote in Paris. [This] inter-nationality … confirms our sense both of a common literary inheritance differently managed in its several locations and of a tradition in women's writing based on common experience and spanning geographical and cultural boundaries. (Blain, Clements, and Grundy x)[162]

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[162] While the Companion restricts itself to one language community, its editors also state: "With all this multiplicity we have remained centred on the English language and its interactions with

The "supranational" (Guillén 3) literary inheritance handed down to us by Murasaki Shikibu, Marie de France, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Edith Wharton does indeed represent a tradition based on common experience, a fact that is made apparent only with their juxtaposition.

As David Damrosch notes, "[w]orld literature is fully in play once several foreign works begin to resonate together in our mind" (Damrosch 298). Such resonating stems from what Caryl Emerson calls the co-experiential: events and emotions occurring during the human lifespan that unite us in myriad ways and so, like her, I refuse to be paralyzed by all that ostensibly divides us. I have argued that liminality motifs are employed by very different writers to represent the disempowered female condition under patriarchy, to challenge the hierarchical practices of a system that denies women the ability to shape their own lives and act in accordance with their self-respect and desire for autonomy. Making no grandiose claims about how all women write, or about messages found in all women's writing, I simply underscore a powerful thematic similarity. The preceding chapters present a specific selection of women-authored courtship narratives that intriguingly employ striking images of bounded bodies and embodied boundaries, analyze the use of these images, and suggest how and why the authors may have chosen to textualize their social comment and protest in this manner. This dissertation sets forth "examples whose mutual coherence is not obvious in advance of their combination. It is as if the reader who asks, "What do X, Y, and Z have to do with one another?" could only get

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users of other languages, from Sappho to Monique Wittig: a kind of integrity, a relevance of independent parts to the understanding of a whole, can be modeled around an Anglophone community or group of communities. We leave to the future the task of relating this linguistic communality to others among the polyglot literary voices of women around the world" (Blain, Clements, and Grundy x). My dissertation is intended to make a modest contribution toward this goal.

the answer, "Nothing—up to now"" (Saussy, "Comparative Literature?," 339). My discussion of what these texts do have to do with one another reveals many aspects that have up to now never been given the attention they deserve. I have demonstrated throughout that material and metaphorical boundaries are used to critique gendered binaries as these four very different works examine female social development; subjectivity and identity; agency; and the politics of interpersonal relationships. And I have argued that how they do so is usefully explained in terms of Arnold van Gennep's and Victor Turner's theorizing of the social rituals of initiation.

By insisting on the liminality rather than marginality of these female characters, I have sought to avoid a reactionary approach that merely reinforces patriarchal attitudes and judgements as to what is central and what not, and why. Our goal as scholars, particularly for those of us working as comparative feminist scholars, must be to avoid reinforcing overly simplistic binaries and instead, for example, "to talk positively about a dynamic and irrepressible production of thresholds, gateways, passages, initiation rituals and other-realms, all expanding the limits of our socially ordered world, puncturing its skin and disrupting its structure" (Sutton, "Liminal attributes," 18). My authors may code femininity in "paradigms of sexual vulnerability" (Miller xi), but they also and perhaps more importantly do so in paradigms of strength and resistance, challenging social norms and urging their readers to re-imagine, if not reconstruct, the world in less exploitive ways. To paraphrase Nancy Miller, the Genji Monogatari, Eliduc, A Simple Story, and The House of Mirth are all definitely female in impulse and origin, feminist in spirit (see Miller 149). Each of these works reveals that male-dominated structures, wherein power is highly disequilibriated, skew relations between the sexes and leave women in a disadvantaged position.

This argument has sought to avoid essentialism. In discussing women's writing as women's writing, it in no way claims that females write in a certain way because of biology. Rather, insofar as the content and style of their writing differs from men's, it is owing to the socially constructed nature of the circumstances under which they live and create. I have also made efforts to avoid a colonizing universalism, in no small part by taking Murasaki Shikibu rather than a modern, Western author as the starting point for the discussion. Too often have Eurocentric values, especially those of a hegemonic male, upper middle-class population been deemed to be representative, to the effect that only those aspects of other cultures that reinforced prevailing views or provided a basis for exoticizing were taken into account. The goal of today's Comparative Literature is to read similarity within difference without eliding the difference that exists within that similarity. Accordingly, I have posited that the "like-but-unlike" (Damrosch 12) use of boundary images in the women-authored texts brought together here is worthy of consideration.

Straddling both East and West, the ancient and modern worlds, and multiple linguistic communities, I take comfort in the notion that "in-between-ness is … just the position for a student of comparative literature" (Zhang Longxi, an expert in East-West Comparative Literature at the City University of Hong Kong, personal communication). As the discipline of Comparative Literature shifts focus from the Old World to the whole world,[163] renounces an "insistent presentism that erases the past" (Damrosch 17), and moves beyond a white, male-gendered canon to a more inclusive corpus that incorporates texts by women and others previously marginalized, we discover novel and surprising connections that cannot help but add significantly to our knowledge of literature and the human condition. Kushner reminds us of "the ultimate common possession of all literatures: the value vested in the written word" (Kushner 17). As writers, Murasaki Shikibu, Marie de France, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Edith Wharton all vested tremendous value in that written word, in its power to transmit messages both explicit and implicit. As readers and scholars, we join in this valuation by developing innovative approaches that enable us to grasp those messages to their fullest extent.

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[163] For an in-depth discussion of this shift, see especially pages 110-44 in Damrosch, World Literature.

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